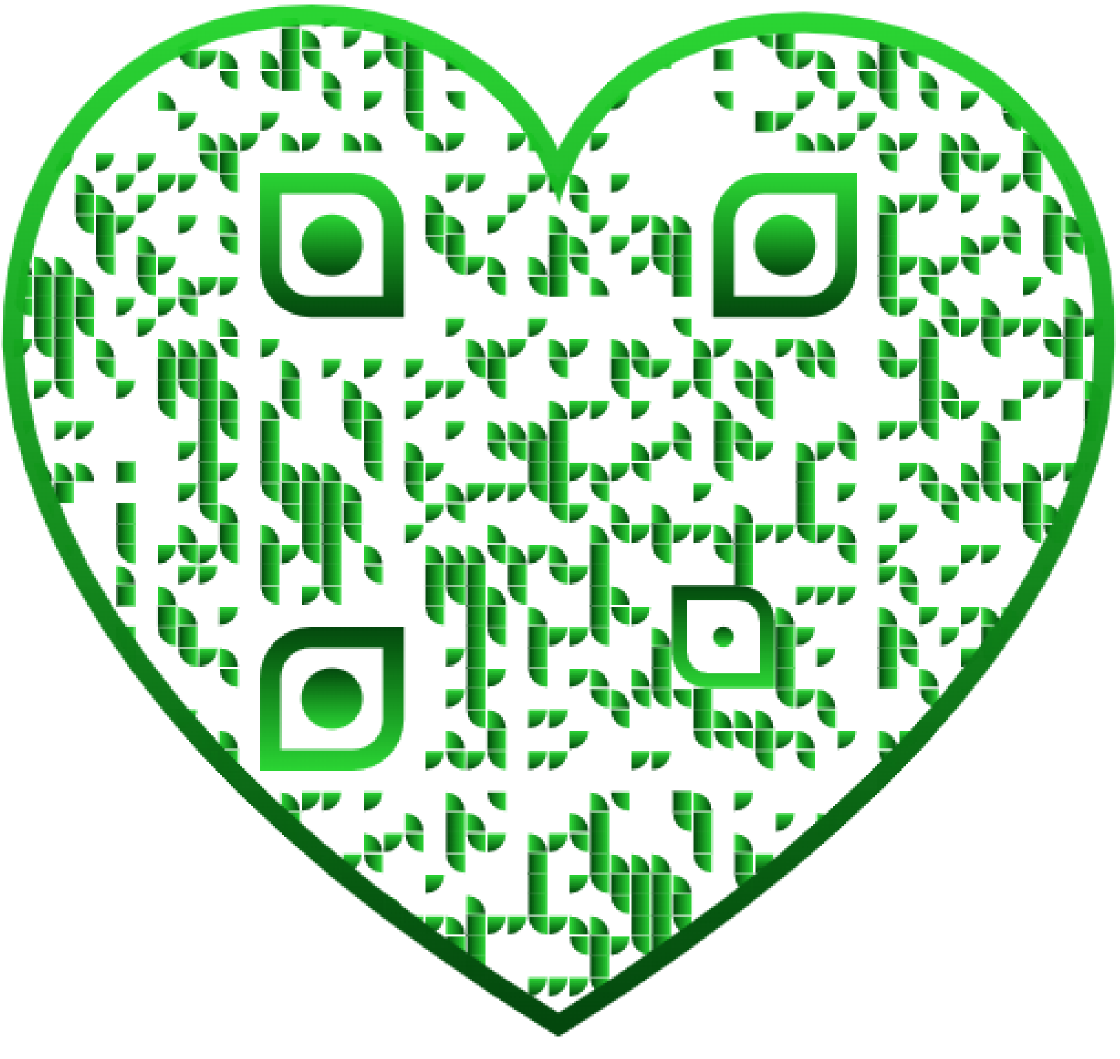
ISSUE #4 2025

ARTDOC

Photography Magazine

GLOBAL CONNECTION



CONTENTS

INTERVIEWS

16 Migration Without Departure

Oscar Villeda

Oscar Villeda's Tu pueblo sabe honours Maya Mam resilience, migration, and memory.

46 Remembering Our Origins

Natalie Karpushenko

Kazakhstan-based photographer Natalie Karpushenko reminds humans of nature's sacred truths.

72 Dignified human statues in the desert

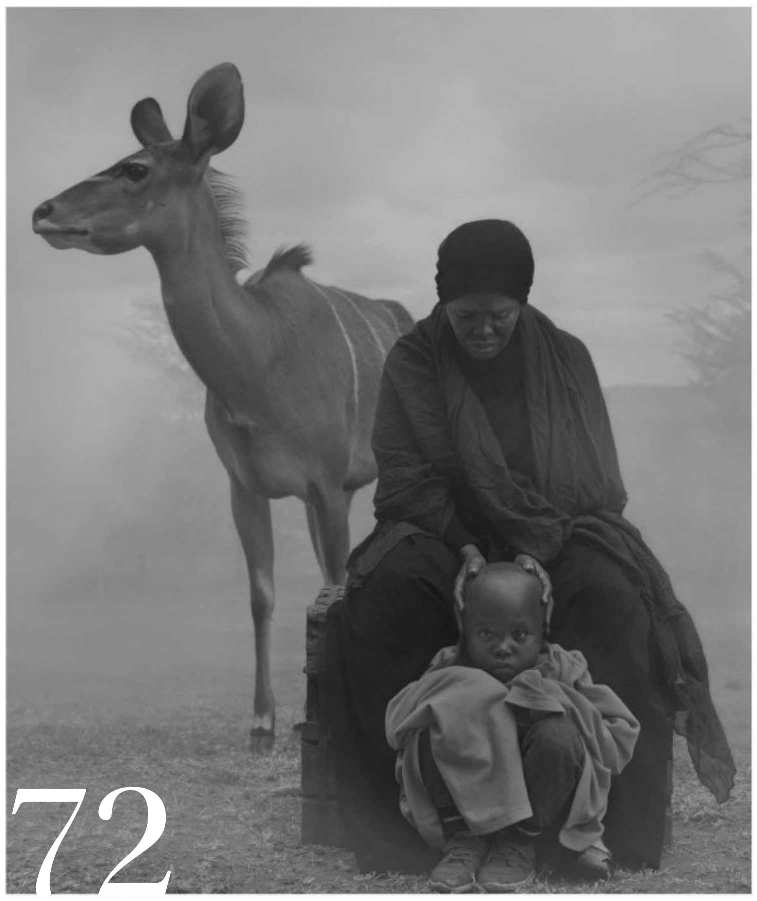
Nick Brandt

Nick Brandt creates portraits of animals and people affected by climate change.

110 The resistance of past enslaved communities

Nicola Lo Calzo

Nicola Lo Calzo documents postcolonial memory and legacy among slavery's descendants.



EXHIBITION

88 Crossing Identities

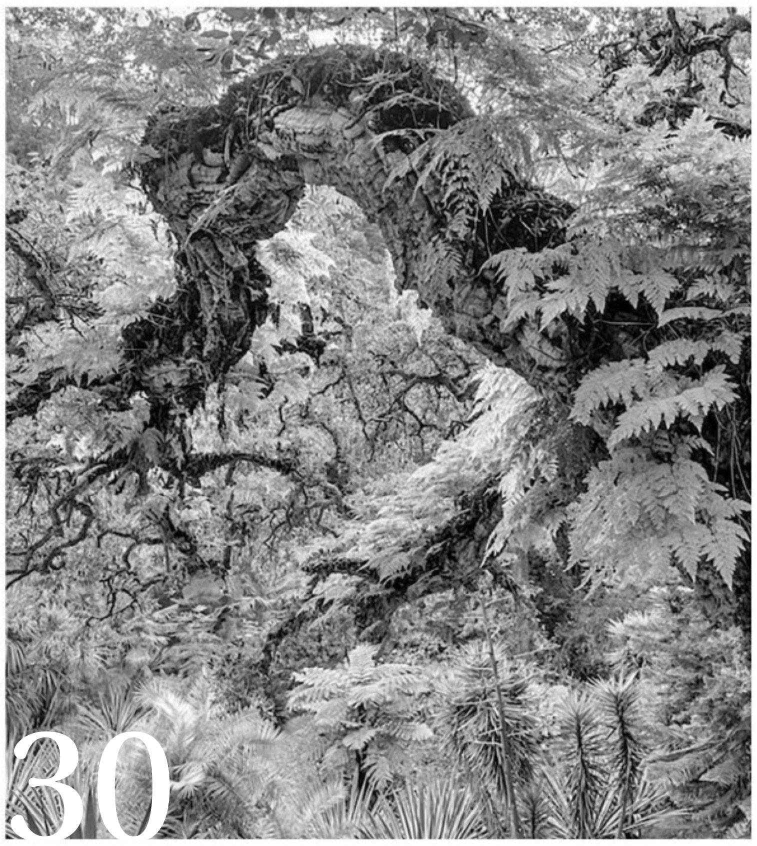
Artdoc Exhibition Highlights

Crossing Identities showcases connections across borders, cultures, and human experiences.

GALLERY FEATURE

30 Artdoc Gallery

A curated collection bringing photography beyond the frame.



INSPIRATION

12 **Bunong Guardians**

Andrew Califf

While on a reporting trip in Cambodia, Andrew Califf documented a special Bunong ceremony.

42 **Eating the Same Stone**

Tracy Longley-Cook

Tracy Longley-Cook reflects on loss and grief through symbolic photographic ritual.

68 **Jasmine**

Madalena Georgatou

Madalena Georgatou explores three generations through intricate family history narratives.

96 **Dreamscapes of She**

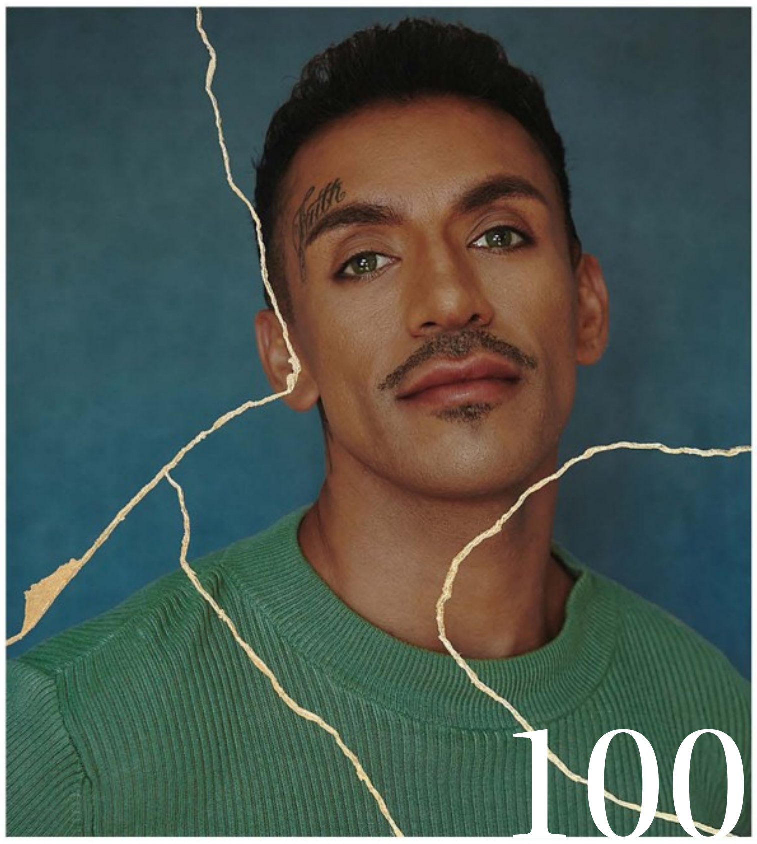
Xenia Chetrar

Xenia Chetrar explores memory, identity, and life's ephemeral nature through photography.

106 **Amazon Descendants**

Marta Stoyanova

She explores identity and belonging through photography across diverse global communities.



FEATURED

06 **Coming Home**

Carolina Ludwig Agudelo

Carolina Ludwig Agudelo portrays Nepali women's journey, courage, and complex homecoming.

36 **Prisoners**

Pavlo Fyshar

In *Prisoners*, Pavlo Fyshar transforms the ordinary into symbols of quiet entrapment.

62 **Tactile Memory**

Madina Baymirzaeva

In *Tactile Memory*, Madina Baymirzaeva explores the body's presence and belonging.

100 **Light Through Cracks**

Gala Semenova

Gala Semenova transforms brokenness into beauty, honouring survival and healing.

“

We explore photography as a bridge across borders, cultures, and lived experiences.

- The Artdoc Team

Global Connection

Photography as a bridge across borders

In this issue of Artdoc Magazine, we explore photography as a bridge across borders, cultures, and lived experiences. The stories gathered here invite us to witness both beauty and struggle: images of migrating families, intimacy and loss, communities reclaiming identity, and the challenges of climate change. These photographs do more than document—they connect us, urging reflection on the threads that bind humanity in a fractured world. Through art and critical storytelling, *Global Connection* offers not only perspectives on urgent social issues but also glimpses of resilience, dignity, and shared hope.

We invite readers to explore our cover story of the American photographer Nick Brandt, who has added a new chapter, *The Echo of Our Voices*, to his ongoing long-term project *The Day May Break*. Brandt captures the relationship between people and their environment, affected by climate change. In his latest work, he focuses on Syrian refugees in the Jordanian desert.

Since the abolition of slavery in the 19th century, descendants of those once enslaved still grapple with their inherited past. Paris-based photographer Nicola Lo Calzo documents the resistance of former enslaved communities in his worldwide project *Kam*. He explores the complexity of visible and hidden memories among postcolonial descendants, highlighting their strength and resilience. At the centre of Oscar Villeda's work is *Tu pueblo sabe*, a long-term project honouring the resilience of a Maya Mam community. High in the Cuchumatanes mountains, he has photographed stories of migrating families.

Kazakhstan-based photographer Natalie Karpushenko photographed floating ephemeral bodies underwater as an urgent call to remember what has been forgotten. At the heart of her practice lies the conviction that human beings are not separate from the natural world but are born of it, shaped by the same elements and bound to the same cycles.

Artdoc Issue #4 2025 features Carolina Ludwig Agudelo, Galina Semenova, Madina Baymirzaeva, and Pavlo Fyshar. They explore the struggles, courage, and hope of vulnerable people, ranging from Nepalese women to those affected by domestic abuse. In Inspiration, we present more talented global stories of connection from a variety of photographers worldwide. *Global Connection* reminds us that photography is not only a witness but a thread — weaving together our shared humanity and revealing that every story of struggle or hope is part of the same fabric of connection.

- The Artdoc Team

© Carolina Ludwig Agudelo I Coming Home

Coming Home

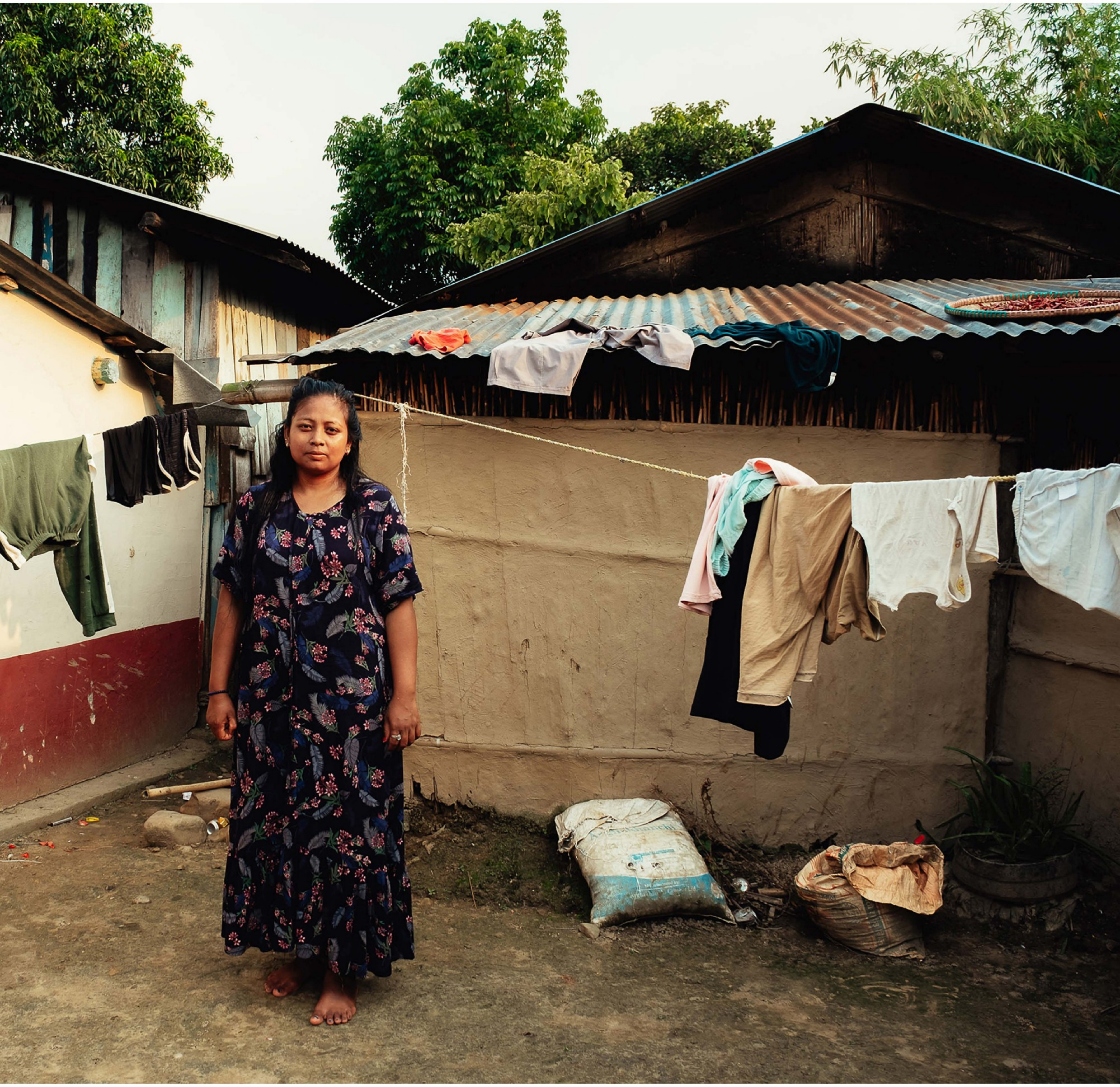
Carolina Ludwig Agudelo

With *Coming Home*, photographer Carolina Ludwig Agudelo turns her lens towards the quiet resilience of Nepali women returning from domestic labour in the Gulf. Rooted in intimate encounters in Chitwan, the series captures the fragile space between departure and return, questioning what “home” truly signifies beyond walls and geography. By foregrounding voices often silenced by restrictive migration policies and societal inequities, Agudelo highlights both the courage and vulnerability of these women. Her work not only illuminates the injustices of displacement and exploitation but also honours the dignity and agency of those who navigate them. In doing so, *Coming Home* reframes migration as a deeply human story of struggle, belonging, and the search for emotional refuge.

“*Coming Home* is a photographic series that explores the emotional weight of departure and return, of borders crossed and those imposed, and the complex notion of what it means to come home. Through the personal stories of Nepali returnees who migrated to Gulf countries to work as domestic workers, this body of work highlights their struggles, courage, and autonomy, while exploring the significance of home—not as a domestic unit, but as a feeling: one of familiarity, security, and emotional connection.

In response to frequent reports of abuse and exploitation in the domestic work sector, the Nepali government has, since 1998, implemented various migration bans and restrictions for women, specifically targeting those travelling to Gulf countries. While framed as protective, these policies challenge women’s fundamental right to mobility and fail to address the root causes of migration, such as economic hardship, gender inequality, and caste-based discrimination. As a result, many women from disadvantaged backgrounds are often pushed to migrate through informal and unsafe channels.

Taking place in Chitwan, Nepal, this series emerged from intimate encounters with returnee women who welcomed me into their homes and, with kindness and patience, said: “Please, sister, sit down.” By sharing their stories, I hope to humanise the complexities of temporary labour migration and provide a space where the resilience, agency, and diverse experiences of Nepali returnees are seen and remembered.



© Carolina Ludwig Agudelo | Coming Home

All images © Carolina Ludwig Agudelo I Coming Home

About

Carolina Agudelo is a Brazilian photographer based in Copenhagen. Through her practice, she explores the intricate relationship between people and their environments, creating images that invite viewers to contemplate and connect. With an MSc in Global Development, she integrates her background in social sciences into her photography, aiming to produce work that enriches our understanding of people–place relationships.

www.carolinaagudelo.com

Bunong Guardians

Andrew Califf

“While on a reporting trip in Cambodia, I documented a very special Bunong ceremony. After first meeting in the village, I rode with members of the community on small motorbikes, up and down muddy trails and across streams, until we reached a shrine deep within their ancestral forest. They were preparing a sacrifice and feast for the following day, asking the forest spirits to protect them from an international development project threatening to consume half of their land. As night fell, I spent the evening documenting their preparations and worship, while the shrine became a flurry of activity. They busied themselves with preparing a pig for the ensuing feast. Their work also included chopping bamboo shoots for Bunong stew and readying wax and bamboo shafts for the ceremony. Once everything was complete, everyone camped at the shrine in hammocks. The forest, central to both ancestor worship and daily foraging, also holds a burial ground. The next day, project representatives and government officials visited in order to better understand the conflict. The development project has not advanced within their forest since this ceremony in mid-2023, and its end date in 2026 is fast approaching. Their ceremony and unified front may have saved their forest, their ancestors, and their traditions.

About
Andrew Califf is a photographer and journalist with a background in anthropology and archaeology. He primarily covers stories on conservation, climate change, and Indigenous rights, with an underlying interest in how people interact with their changing environments. This is a central element of his photographic projects, as he draws on his anthropological background to create images that capture subsistence strategies and the feedback loop between people and the unique environments they rely upon.

www.andrewcaliff.com

All images © Andrew Califf | Bunong Guardians

All images © Andrew Califf | Bunong Guardians

© Oscar Villeda | Tu pueblo sabe

Migration Without Departure

Oscar Villeda

High in the Cuchumatanes mountains, where the streets of Todos Santos Cuchumatán carry the weight of journeys taken and those yet to come, Oscar Villeda has shaped a photographic language grounded in belonging. His photographs hold both absence and presence, capturing the tender spaces where family, memory, and migration meet. At the centre of this practice stands *Tu pueblo sabe*, a long-term project that honours the resilience of a Maya Mam community and the affections that travel with its people. His images linger on the symbols and iconography of the United States, used and redefined within the Maya village. “This transformation of the local imagery is the result of the efforts of men and women looking to achieve the modernity that they could not find within their borders.”

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All images © Oscar Villeda | Tu pueblo sabe

In 2022, Villeda began *Tu pueblo sabe*, a project set in Todos Santos Cuchumatán, a Maya Mam community high in the Cuchumatanes mountains. The project explores how family stories, affections, and memory migrate alongside—or in place of—people. While migration stories often follow a journey outward, this one remains firmly in place. Here, the traces of departure are everywhere: boys in crisp baseball caps and sneakers with American logos; the local cemetery with graves decorated in stripes and stars; houses with bright façades bearing the quiet imprint of relatives working far away, in hopes of finding better opportunities. "The people of Todos Santos show great versatility in taking symbols and iconography from the United States, reinterpreting and using them in this new context as a narrative tool to tell their own story of migration," Villeda explains. "It's a way to pay homage to the land of opportunities or connect with relatives who braved the trip north looking for a better life."

Transnational Families

Todos Santos Cuchumatán is home to more than 30,000 people, the vast majority Maya Mam. Shaped by a long history of inequality and limited opportunities, the community has seen many of its members leave for the United States, creating far-reaching family and cultural networks that stretch across borders. These connections are sustained through remittances, shared celebrations, and a distinctive "architecture without architects" – brightly built homes designed through collaboration between relatives abroad and those who remain. "One of the effects of migration is the emergence of transnational families, which, when fragmented by time and space, resort to various methods that allow them to maintain emotional, social, and economic bonds," Villeda explains. "These often materialise in exchanges in the form of economic and cultural remittances, gifts, photographs, phone calls, and even, when travelling from one country to another is possible, visits.

> “The people of Todos Santos show great versatility in taking symbols and iconography from the United States.

God Bless America

© Oscar Villeda | Tu pueblo sabe

MÁS AHORRO, MÁS PEPSI
3L JUMBO
pepsi
MÁS AHORRO, MÁS PEPSI
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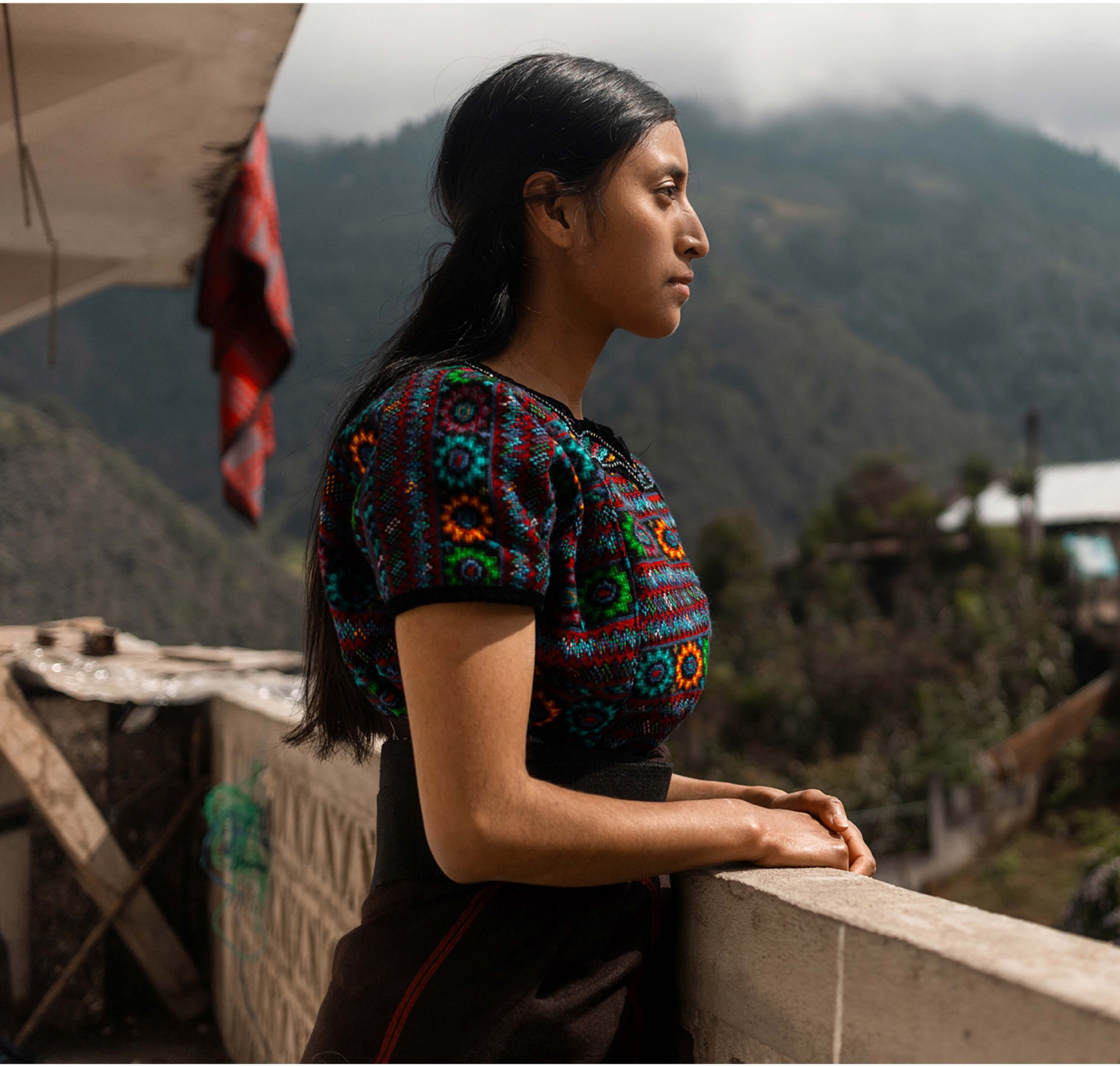
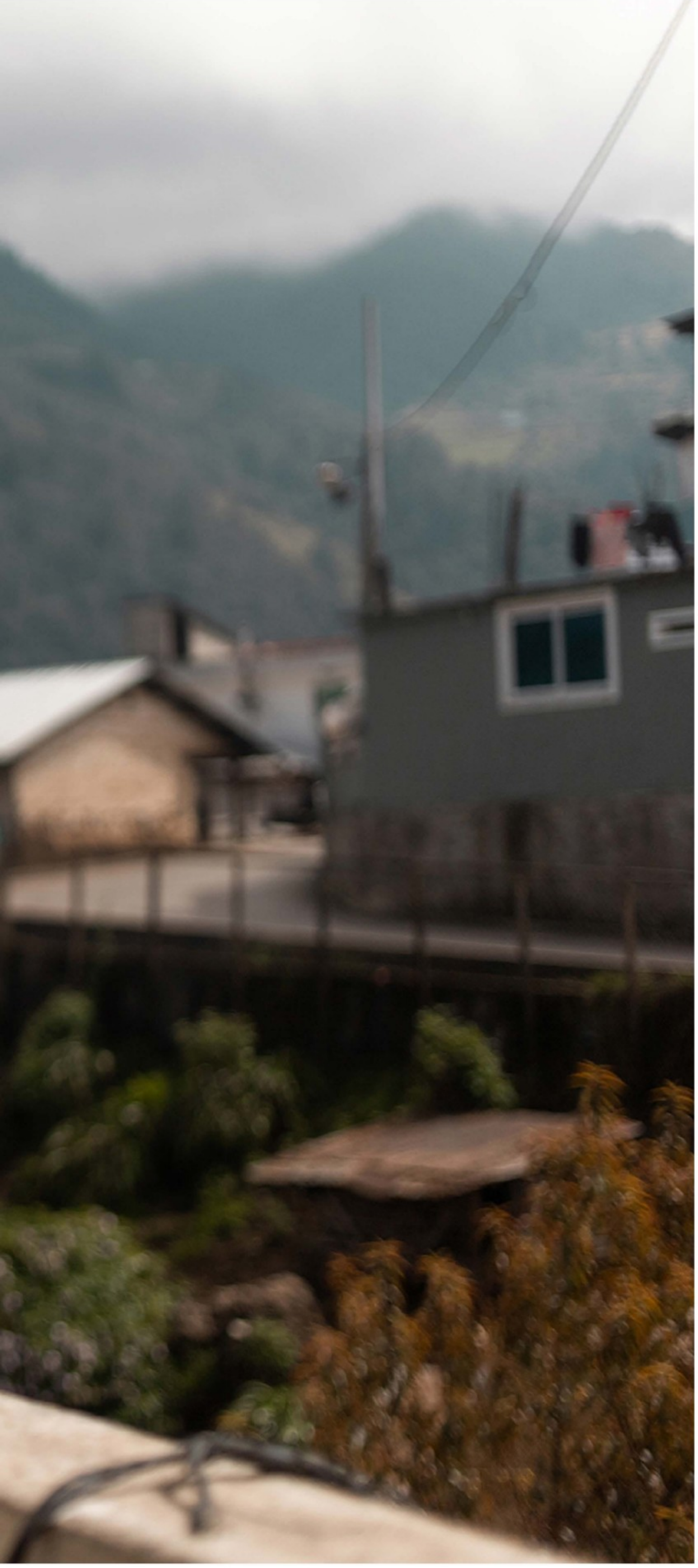


© Oscar Villeda | Tu pueblo sabe



The nuances of the transnational condition are also found in the absence and loss of loved ones. The correct functioning of family ties in this space depends on the quality of family networks and the capacity for communication that exists among its members."

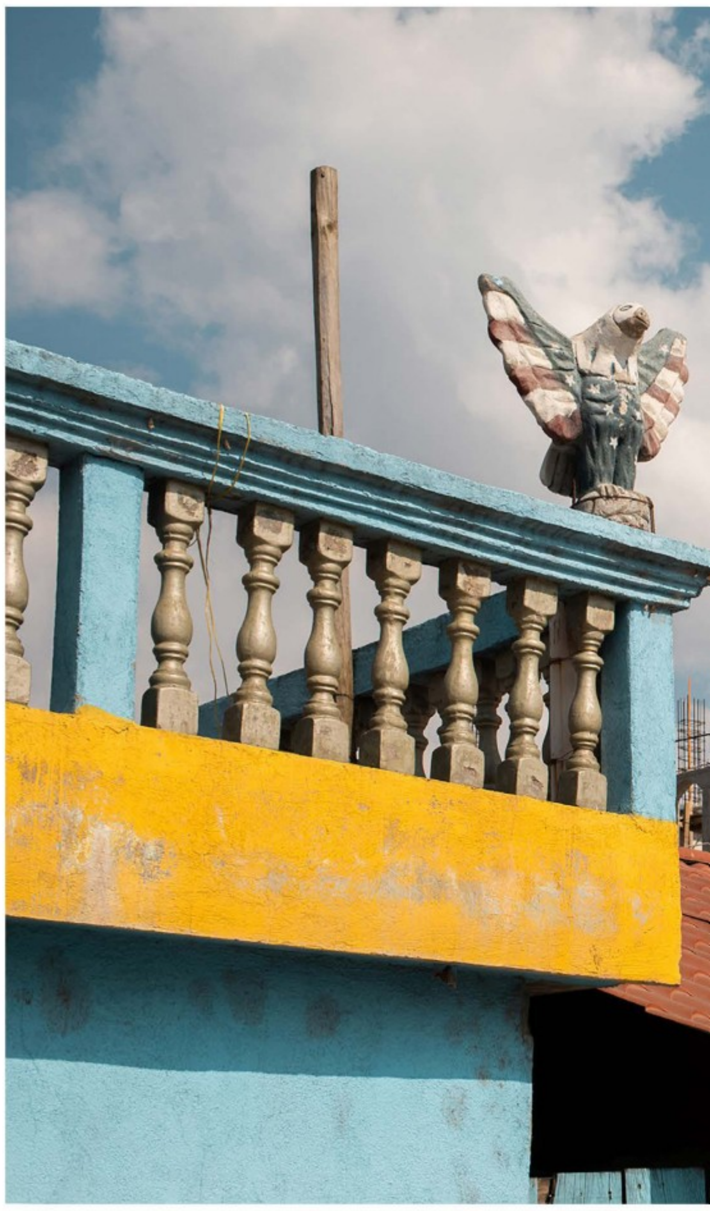
Personal Memories

For Villeda, *Tu pueblo sabe* is inseparable from his own memories. "The act of taking photos feels like small moments and memories throughout my life," he says. "My father worked for many years in the development sector, supporting vulnerable families in rural Guatemala, and he used to take me along on many of his field visits when I was a kid. My mother taught me to look at the world with wonder."

He first studied communications, drawn to video before discovering photography. "It wasn't hard to let go of video. My grandfather is a photographer, and that closeness to the craft made the process much more accessible. Now, as a husband and father—among many other things—I've learned to look inward and allow the story I'm trying to discover also to reveal its tenderness, intimacy, and candour. By searching within myself first, I hope these elements are present in the photographs as well, creating an emotional tone that comes from within."

Photography as Accompaniment

"I believe photography remains a powerful form of communication—despite its limitations and paradoxes," Villeda says. "There are countless historical examples of how photographers' work has not only brought attention to specific issues but also shaped how we see the world, our relationship with it, and even how we see ourselves. Images help shape the ideas we form about any topic or group of people—and the stories we tell ourselves."



All images © Oscar Villeda | Tu pueblo sabe

He is careful to draw a line between representing and speaking for others. “As a photographer, I speak only for myself—especially when dealing with social issues and longstanding inequalities. In my country, there is a lot of that. Many vulnerable communities have been telling their own stories and sharing their struggles for years—it’s just that, in many cases, there are no platforms for their voices to be heard. At the very least, I try to make my work a tool to acknowledge the stories of others and help them reach new ‘ears’.”

For Villeda, the role is not to claim a voice but to walk alongside it. “My role is not to speak for anyone but to respectfully accompany the process of telling and recognising ourselves in the stories around us, even as we acknowledge the differences. I hope my images spark more questions and, perhaps through the need to answer them, inspire others to find ways to get closer and open themselves up to different truths.”

A Grounded Visual Language

To convey family stories, affections, and memories, Villeda wanted the photographs to feel close and grounded. “I thought one way to do this was to eliminate the ‘filters’ that photographic technique sometimes creates between the viewer and the image, and I wanted the photos to feel ‘normal’.”

He used a single 40mm lens for the entire project, a choice he has maintained since 2019. “That consistent practice helped me find a language that fit how I wanted the story to feel. I also tried to include elements from vernacular photography so that my images could echo family albums and framed pictures hanging on the walls of the homes I visited.”

© Oscar Villeda | Tu pueblo sabe

In *Tu pueblo sabe*, much of the work began with walking through the streets and into the mountains of Todos Santos Cuchumatán. “That walking was essential to discovering the stories I eventually learned from. I think my photographs—not just in this project but in general—tend to carry a ‘wandering around’ quality to them.” His approach is also shaped by a close study of other artists. “While working on *Tu pueblo sabe*, I kept on feeling especially inspired by the way photographers like Juanita Escobar and Erika Larsen can elevate the everyday into something mystical.”

Curiosity for Human Experience

For Villeda, curiosity is the starting point of every image. “I always respond to whatever sparks my curiosity. In that sense, photography is a method of learning, understanding, and approaching, while also being a means to share what I’ve learned. I choose themes and subjects that allow me to explore and get closer to ideas I’m discovering. I believe that wherever we go, and with whomever we share space, there’s always a story waiting to be discovered if we open ourselves to let it speak and reveal itself.” For Villeda, storytelling is a way to synthesise the experiences he gains through photography.

“I try to find the thread of meaning that gives a deeper sense to what people tell me, to the places they inhabit, the interactions between the two, and my relationship to it all.”

In Oscar Villeda’s photographs, human connection is never an afterthought—it is the pulse that carries each image. His work emerges from a deep curiosity about how others live, dream, and endure, and from a belief that our shared existence can either fragment or unite us. “I’ve always been curious about how other people carry their own human experience,” he reflects. “Beyond understanding their desires, fears, joys, and pains, I’ve always been drawn to the idea that simply being alive and sharing this planet can either divide us—when we let it—or connect us and remind us that we are not alone.”

About

Oscar Villeda was born in Guatemala City, where he currently lives with his wife, son, and dog. He discovered photography while studying Communications at Universidad Rafael Landívar, graduating in 2012, and later earned a master’s degree in Strategic Design and Innovation. He has worked in the field of international cooperation, addressing issues such as education, poverty, and migration. His experience includes development projects with vulnerable communities, particularly Indigenous youth from Guatemala’s Western Highlands. Much of his photographic work grows out of this background. However, he has also contributed to a wide range of stories as a photographer for national outlets including La Hora, Siglo XXI, Esquisses, and Plaza Pública, as well as international publications such as taz, The New Humanitarian, Guernica, and Asymptote. Since 2015, Villeda has taught photography at several universities across Guatemala. He also organises and hosts a quarterly photography salon, fostering a community of learning, creation, and reflection.

www.oscarvilleda.com

PATRIOTIC
Décor

© Oscar Villeda | Tu pueblo sabe

> Images help shape the ideas we form about any topic or group of people—and the stories we tell ourselves.
>
> - Oscar Villeda

Poetry of Being

Lynne Buchanan

Lynne Buchanan's images express her response to the fragility and perseverance of nature and include images of what was, things still hanging on, the effects of climate change, and the cycle of life. She immerses herself in nature and connects with what she sees on a prelinguistic level. Her lyrical image-making bypasses her analytical mind, allowing her to experience and respond to both the essence of life and the numinous. Being in wild places reveals poetic truths that are both fleeting and timeless. Lynne's images are reminders of what we are losing and a pathway to hope.

About

Lynne Buchanan has published two books: The Poetry of Being (2023) and Florida's Changing Waters: A Beautiful World in Peril (2019). Her photographs have been featured in solo and group exhibitions across the United States, as well as in Barcelona, Spain and Athens, Greece. She was one of Photolucida's Top 200 finalists in 2016. In 2023, she received an honourable mention for her platinum-palladium Poetry of Being series and honourable mentions in four other categories in the 19th Julia Margaret Cameron Awards. She also received an honourable mention for her Wanderings in Wild Places series in the 19th Pollux Awards.

SEE MORE ARTWORKS

Colours of the rain

Viet Ha Tran

Viet Ha Tran's photographic journey has evolved from intricate female portraits exploring human emotion to capturing the serene, impressionistic beauty of nature. This shift reflects her deep connection to the natural world and a growing focus on sustainability and environmental awareness. By transforming nature photography into vibrant, painterly artworks, she seeks to highlight the delicate balance of ecosystems and inspire a deeper appreciation for the planet's beauty. Through her work, she hopes to encourage viewers to reflect on the importance of preserving its harmony for future generations.

About

Viet Ha Tran is a Vietnam-born contemporary artist and fine art photographer whose distinctive vision has led to prestigious collaborations with global institutions such as Amazon USA, Louis Vuitton France, and Vogue Italy. Her work has been featured in over 100 international publications, including Vogue, Vanity Fair France, The Times of India, Vietnam News, and leading Spanish media such as Expansión and El Economista. She currently serves as Board Member at The Royal Photographic Society of Spain, where she made history as the first foreigner to hold such a position in the Society's 125-year history.

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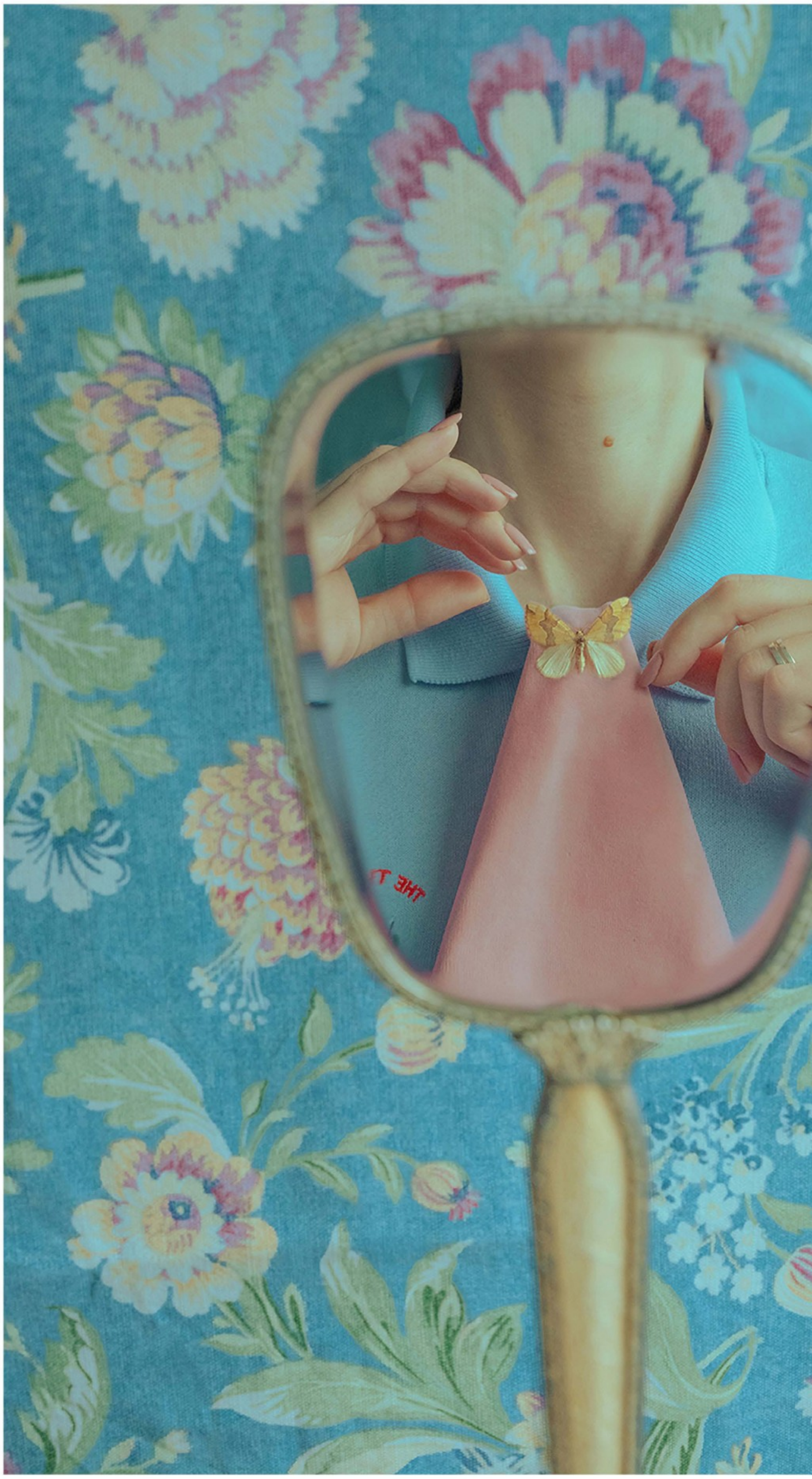
Prisoners

Pavlo Fyshar

In *Prisoners,* Pavlo Fyshar transforms the ordinary into symbols of quiet entrapment. Using mirrors, pillows, and soft fabrics, they create dreamlike scenes where pastel tones veil an undercurrent of irony and unease. Figures appear fragmented or obscured, caught between reality and illusion, reflecting the subtle ways we confine ourselves through routines, expectations, and doubt. Fyshar's surreal aesthetic softens the weight of isolation while sharpening its resonance, revealing how invisible boundaries shape our inner lives. With a delicate tension between comfort and constraint, Prisoners invites viewers to reflect on where freedom ends and quiet captivity begins.

© Pavlo Fyshar I Silence of the Lambs - Prisoners

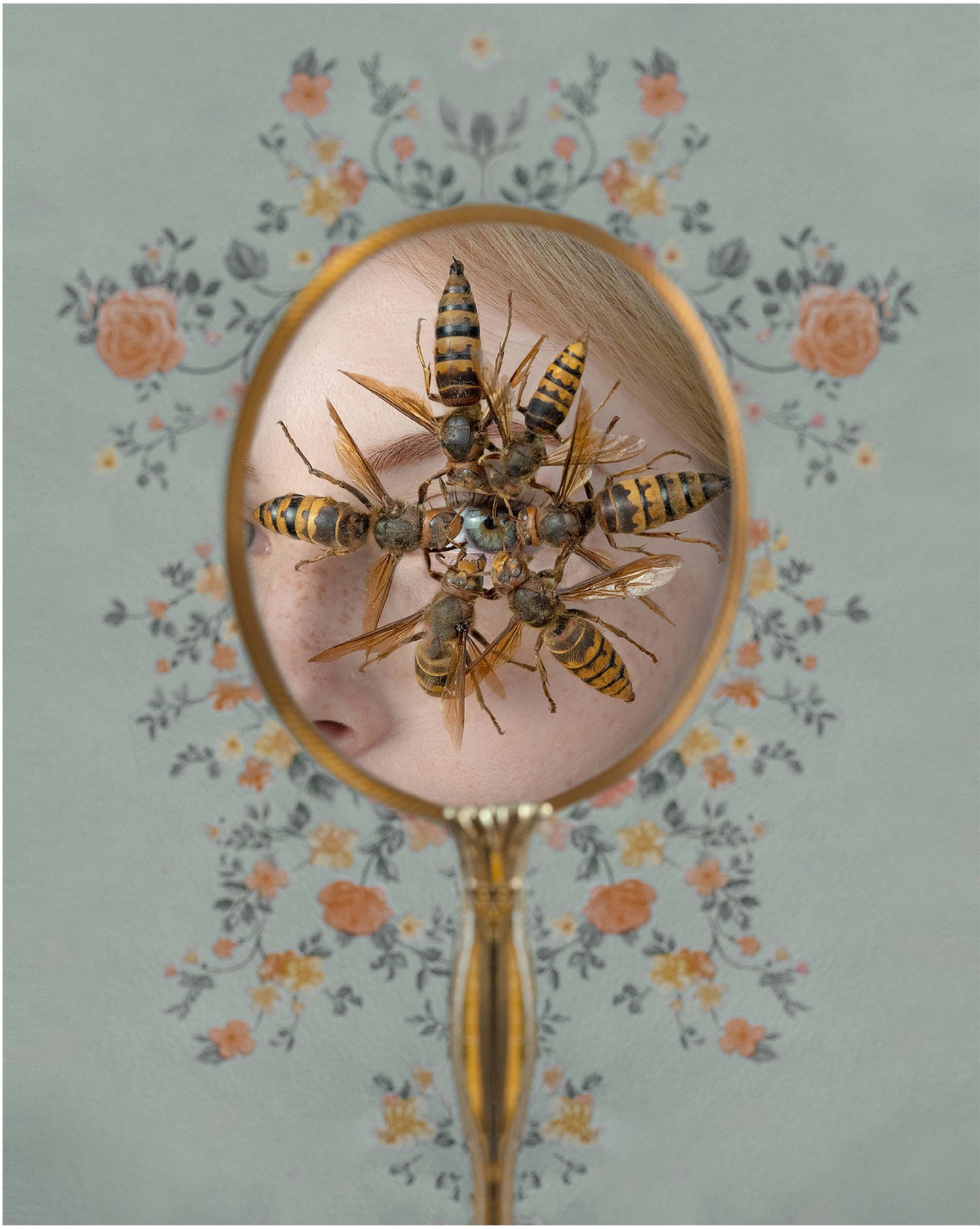
> The *Prisoners* series explores the feeling of being trapped — not always by walls, but by everyday life, personal doubts, and invisible boundaries. The photographs use mirrors, pillows, soft fabrics, and pastel colours to create a quiet, surreal atmosphere in which ordinary objects become symbols of limitation.
>
> The people in these images appear suspended between reality and illusion. Their bodies are hidden, fragmented, or distorted, reflecting how we sometimes lose ourselves in routines, roles, or expectations. The soft tones contrast with the deeper, slightly absurd, and ironic message about inner isolation.



About

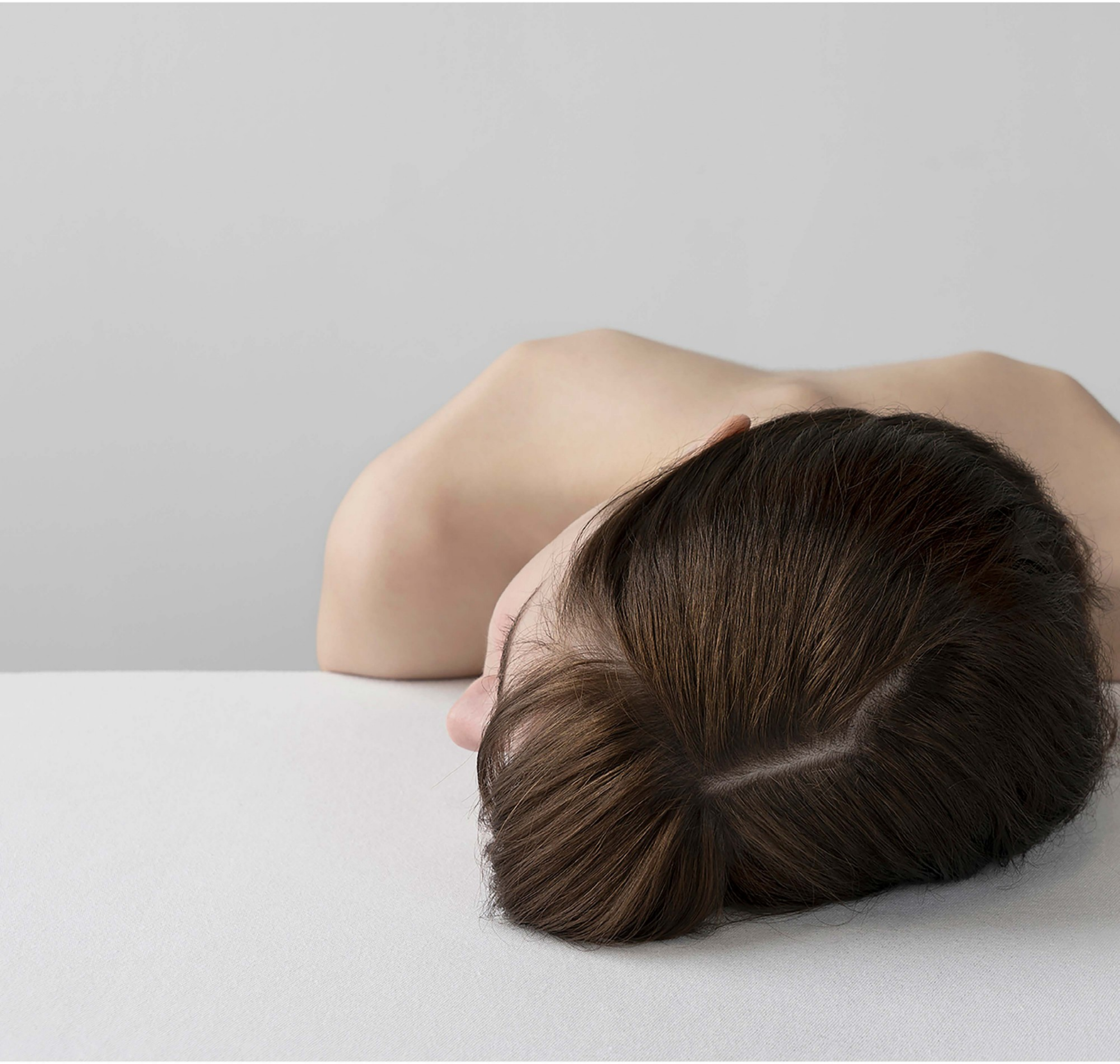
Born in 1990 in Shostka, Ukraine, the artist's early fascination with researching and collecting insects continues to influence their work. Their introduction to photography was gradual, beginning with macro images of flowers and landscapes, taken on a small soapbox Canon camera. Later, they moved towards portraiture, often photographing young women with freckles. More recent work features butterflies, beetles, mirrors, and pastel colours, created in Kyiv between May and October 2022, following the outbreak of war.

More information



All images © Pavlo Fyshar | Measure II - Prisoners

All images © Pavlo Fyshar | Noisy neighbours - Prisoners



© Tracy Longley-Cook | Eating the Same Stone

Eating the Same Stone

Tracy Longley-Cook

“The photographic image is a fitting medium through which to reflect on what once lived. The past is inherently suspended, stilled, and silenced in any photograph, leaving the viewer to contemplate what once was. In the words of Harry Carroll, “photography takes the life out of living subjects and renders them into ‘corpses’.” These photographs serve as permanent relics, embodying ritualistic observances related to personal loss.

Inhabiting a visually austere environment, an isolated and anonymous figure engages in reserved and symbolic acts of bereavement. These performances draw inspiration from various traditional cultural and religious mourning practices, as well as personal reflections on loss, memory, and the passage of time. Contemporary society—particularly within Western cultures—struggles with how to negotiate and process grief. Presenting this subject in a public setting asks the audience to reflect upon, and respond to personal and communal loss to find solace.

About

Tracy Longley-Cook holds a BFA and MFA in Photography from the University of Washington (1997) and Arizona State University (2007). She also studied at the Maine Photographic Workshops residency programme from 1994 to 1995. Currently, she is an Associate Professor of Photography at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. Themes of transformation, memory, and perception strongly influence her interests as a visual artist, educator, and curator. Through the use of both experimental and traditional techniques, Tracy incorporates a wide range of working methods into her photography, prints, and books.

More information

All images © Tracy Longley-Cook I Eating the Same Stone

© Natalie Karpushenko | Rebirth

Remembering Our Origins

Natalie Karpushenko

Kazakhstan-based photographer Natalie Karpushenko sees the act of creating images as more than an aesthetic pursuit—it is an urgent call to remember what has been forgotten. At the heart of her practice lies the conviction that human beings are not separate from the natural world but are born of it, shaped by the same elements and bound to the same cycles. For her, photography is not only about beauty but about healing—each image an offering, a bridge back to the elemental truth of belonging. “My photography explores the sacred connection between humans and nature, particularly through water—the element we all emerged from.”

Karpushenko is drawn to the subtle interrelationships between human form and landscape, gestures of belonging that are easily forgotten. "I'm fascinated by how we've forgotten our wild origins and become disconnected from our natural home. Through my lens, I capture moments where the human form mirrors natural shapes—a woman's silhouette echoing a rock formation, or bodies moving like flowing water." These images are not simply aesthetic experiments; for her, they carry a vital message. "These themes matter deeply because I believe our planet's healing depends on remembering we're not separate from nature, but part of it. Each image is my attempt to bridge that forgotten bond and inspire others to see themselves reflected in the natural world around them."

That message is carried not only in what she photographs, but in how she finds her subjects. Her process is intuitive, almost instinctive, as though guided by the land and water themselves. She describes it as a kind of listening. "I might notice how a rock formation resembles the female form, or observe an animal in its habitat and remember our own wild essence. Sometimes I swim through ocean plastic and imagine the fish's perspective in their polluted home. My storytelling is about capturing fleeting moments where the boundary between human and nature dissolves, creating visual poetry that speaks to our shared origins and interdependence."

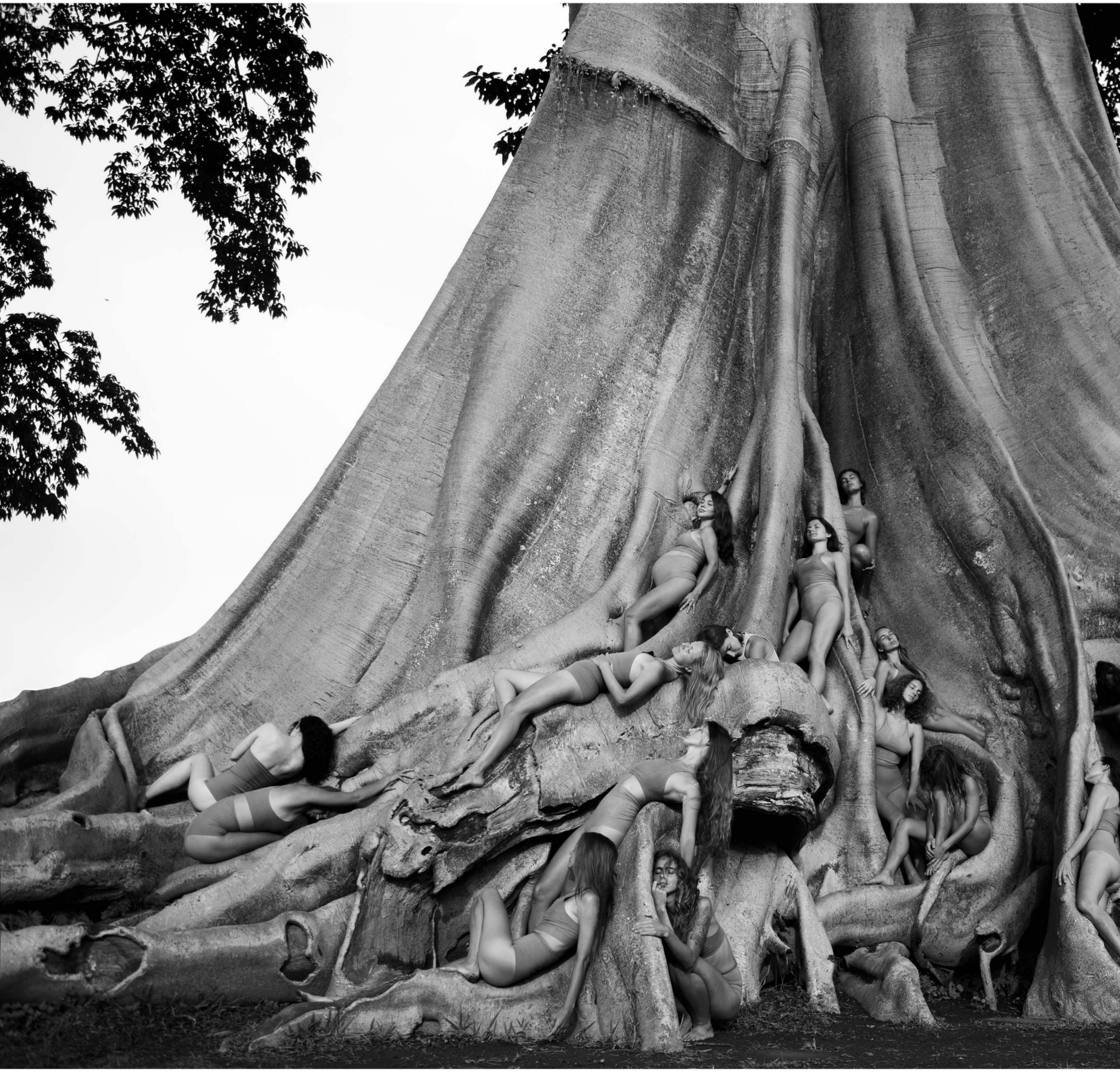
Environmentalist Perspective

Karpushenko's vision has been shaped by movement across cultures and landscapes, each encounter deepening her sense that humanity, despite its divisions, springs from the same elemental source. "My travels across different cultures and environments shaped my understanding that despite our diverse backgrounds, we all share the same elemental origins. This realisation infuses my work with both melancholy for what we've lost and hope for what we can reclaim." Her background in fine art and architecture also informs the way she sees—order and structure revealed in natural forms, fluidity and flow discovered in the human body. Yet it is her environmentalist perspective that lends her images a quiet urgency. "My environmentalist perspective adds urgency to my images—there's a longing quality, as if each photograph is a love letter to a disappearing world. The emotional tone carries both celebration of natural beauty and a quiet call to action for its protection."

> “ I'm fascinated by how we've forgotten our wild origins and become disconnected from our natural home.

All images © Natalie Karpushenko I Rebirth

© Natalie Karpushenko | Rebirth



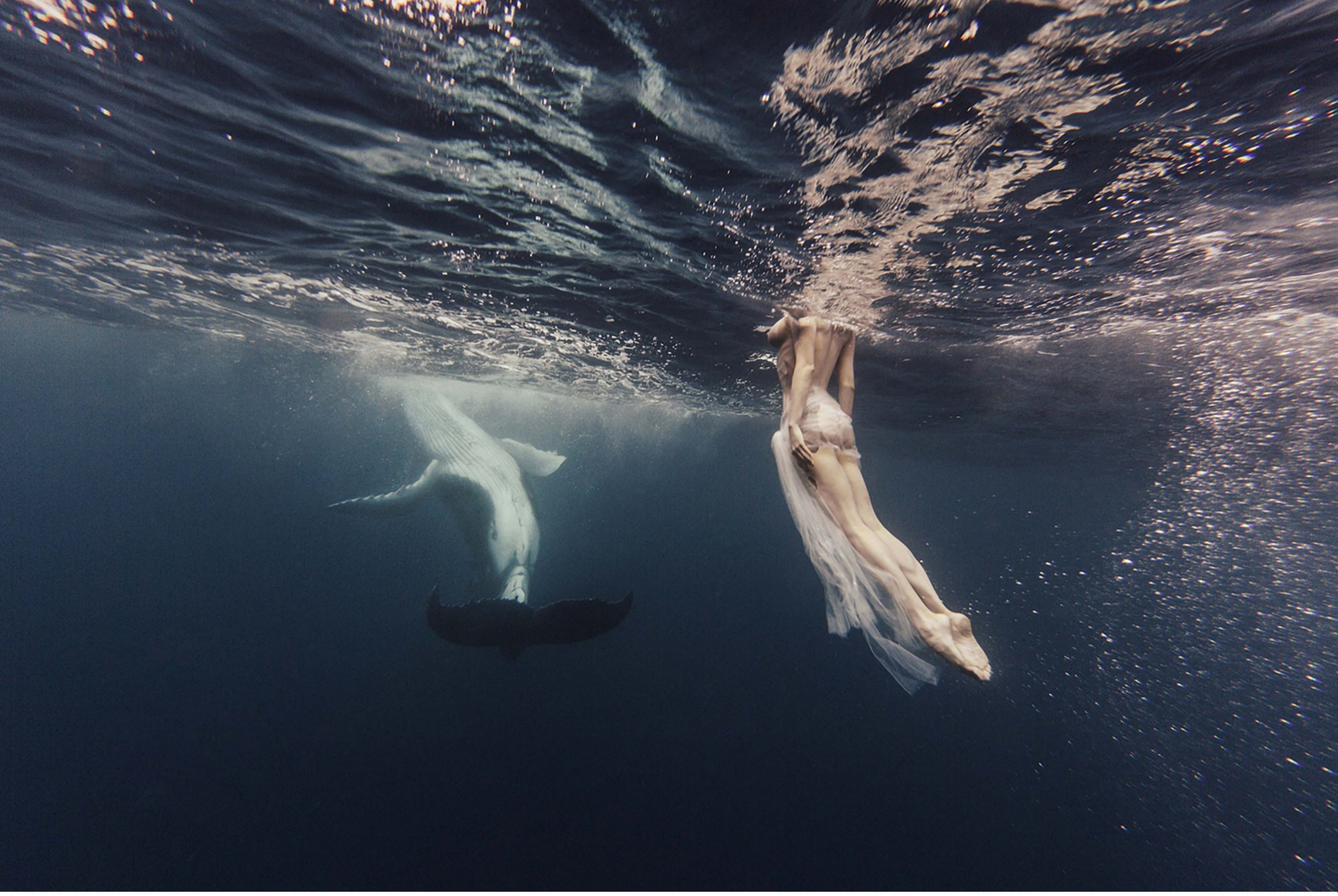
© Natalie Karpushenko | Rebirth

Appreciation and Protection

For Karpushenko, the success of an image lies in its ability to awaken something dormant in the viewer. "I want viewers to feel a profound moment of recognition—the 'remembering' of our connection to nature. When someone looks at my work, I hope they experience a shift from seeing themselves as separate from the natural world to understanding they're part of it." Her photographs hold both wonder and discomfort, echoing the dual emotions she experiences. "I want them to feel the same wonder I feel when I see a woman's curve echoing a mountain's silhouette, or the same concern I feel swimming through plastic debris." The ultimate aim is not simply contemplation, but transformation. "Most importantly, I hope my images inspire a deep appreciation and protective instinct for our planet. If my art can make someone pause and truly see the magic in the union between human and nature, then it has fulfilled its purpose."

Visual Poetry as Activism

Karpushenko's work operates in two registers at once: the poetic and the political. "My art is both visual poetry and environmental activism. Through beauty, I convey the urgent message that reconnecting with nature is essential for healing ourselves and our planet. Each image raises awareness about our disconnection from the natural world and the consequences of this separation. When I photograph plastic pollution alongside natural beauty, or capture humans harmoniously integrated with their environment, I'm showing both the problem and the solution." Her message is clear: "Environmental protection isn't about saving something external to us—it's about remembering that we are nature, and by healing our relationship with the earth, we heal ourselves."



All images © Natalie Karpushenko | Rebirth

Her work challenges entrenched cultural narratives, particularly the assumption that humans exist apart from or above the natural world. “Through visual storytelling, I’m contributing to conversations about sustainable living, environmental responsibility, and spiritual reconnection with the earth.” By aligning the female form with natural landscapes, she introduces another layer of meaning—an exploration of feminine power and its connection to Mother Earth. “I hope my images spark discussions about how we can restructure our societies to honour rather than exploit natural systems.”

The Language of Light and Symbols

For Karpushenko, light is not just an element of photography but a collaborator. “I use natural light to create seamless integration between human subjects and their environment, making it unclear where one ends and the other begins.” Composition follows the same principle: figures placed to echo the curves of rocks or the flow of water, colours drawn from earth and sea—tones of soil, stone, and deep blue. “Underwater photography is a special technique I use to literally immerse subjects in the element of our origin. I also employ reflection and transparency effects to

show the interpenetration of human and natural forms, creating images where boundaries dissolve and unity emerges through pure visual poetry."

The imagery is enriched by a symbolic lexicon that recurs across her work. "Water is my most powerful recurring motif—it represents our origin, our life force, and our shared essence with all living beings. The female form appears frequently, often positioned to mirror natural landscapes, symbolising the connection between feminine energy and Mother Earth. Rocks and stone formations recur as symbols of permanence and ancient wisdom. Plastic debris has become an unfortunate but important motif, representing humanity's disconnection from natural cycles." Each carries its own resonance: water as healing, stone as grounding, the female form as creative life force, and plastic as a wake-up call. Together, they form a visual language that insists on remembering our place within nature's unfolding story.

A Prayer for Remembrance

Karpushenko's artistic path continues to deepen into the mysteries of our bond with water and earth. "I'm excited to explore how ancient wisdom traditions understood our connection to nature,

© Natalie Karpushenko | Rebirth

and how this knowledge can inform contemporary environmental healing. I want to investigate the role of ritual and ceremony in reconnecting with natural cycles." Future projects will take her further beneath the surface, expanding her underwater practice to reveal both the beauty and the fragility of marine ecosystems. She is also drawn to collaborating with indigenous communities whose traditions embody strong connections to the land. As she acknowledges, the urgency of her work only grows sharper: "As climate change accelerates, my work will undoubtedly become more urgent in its call for remembering our wild, interconnected nature."

For Karpushenko, the act of making images is inseparable from the act of care. "Through my lens, I'm not just documenting the world—I'm participating in its healing. Every photograph is an act of love, a prayer for remembrance, and an invitation to return home to our natural selves. Art has the power to change hearts, and changed hearts can change the world."

About

Natalie Karpushenko, born in Kazakhstan, has built a multidisciplinary career shaped by both art and design. Originally a student of fine art, she later majored in architecture and interior design, experiences that continue to inform the structural and compositional sensibility of her work. She began photographing at the age of eighteen and has since worked extensively as an art director across a range of creative fields. Travelling widely and engaging with diverse cultures and environments, Karpushenko gradually honed her artistic vision and established a practice rooted in the relationship between human beings and the natural world. Today, her photographs are sought after by galleries, publishers, and brands, and her works hang in private collections around the globe.

www.natalie-karpushenko.com

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Through beauty, I convey the urgent message that reconnecting with nature is essential for healing ourselves and our planet.

- Natalie Karpushenko

© Madina Baymirzaeva | Tactile Memory

Tactile Memory

Madina Baymirzaeva

In *Tactile Memory*, photographer Madina Baymirzaeva invites us to rediscover the body as a vessel of presence, sensation, and belonging. Her images trace the human figure's return to elemental encounters with nature—moss underfoot, sunlight on skin, the cool shock of water—transforming fleeting impressions into sensory archives. Far from digital noise and urban detachment, the series restores intimacy between body and landscape, reminding us that memory is held as much in touch as in thought. Baymirzaeva's work is both poetic and radical, urging a reconnection with the primal language of the senses. In doing so, *Tactile Memory* proposes a profound message: that through embodied experience, we remain deeply human and inextricably bound to the earth.

© Madina Baymirzaeva | Tactile Memory

"*Tactile Memory* is a photographic exploration of what it means to truly inhabit the present—through the body, through the senses, and through our deep-rooted connection to the natural world. In these images, the human figure returns to landscapes far removed from digital noise and urban fragmentation, reawakening to the primal sensations of touch, temperature, and texture: moss beneath bare feet, the warmth of sunlight on skin, wind moving across the body, the cool shock of water.

These photographs are more than visual records—they are sensory archives. Each frame captures a moment of embodied stillness and presence, reminding us of the universal language of touch and the intimate knowledge held by the skin, even as memory fades.

In a time when many feel increasingly disembodied—lost in screens, in speed, in disconnection—this work proposes a quiet but radical act: to reclaim the body as our first site of belonging, of memory, and of humanity. It calls for a return to ourselves, not through thought alone, but through sensation, vulnerability, and presence in the living world.

If we were to send a message into space to represent who we are—not as consumers or data, but as humans—let it be this: that we feel, that we remember, and that through the body, we remain connected to one another and to the earth.

All images © Madina Baymirzaeva I Tactile Memory

About
Madina Baymirzaeva is a Russian multidisciplinary photographer and cultural scholar whose practice merges visual art with conceptual research. Her work is rooted in a strong artistic vision, shaped by years of exploring themes of identity, corporeality, time, and transformation. Drawing from her background in cultural studies and personal experience, she creates emotionally charged images that blur the line between reality and inner perception. With poetic sensitivity to light, colour, and form, she builds meditative visual narratives that have been exhibited internationally, including in Rome, London, and the United States. Baymirzaeva's work is both intimate and universal, inviting quiet reflection and presence.

More information

Jasmine

Madalena Georgatou

“Through this project, I attempt to delve into the intricate and interconnected threads of family history, focusing on the lives of three generations. I trace how experiences—both spoken and unspoken—and the collective histories of those who came before me continue to resonate in the present. At its core, this project is about the transmission of inherited traumas: how the struggles, pain, and unvoiced stories of one generation are passed down from grandmother to daughter to granddaughter.

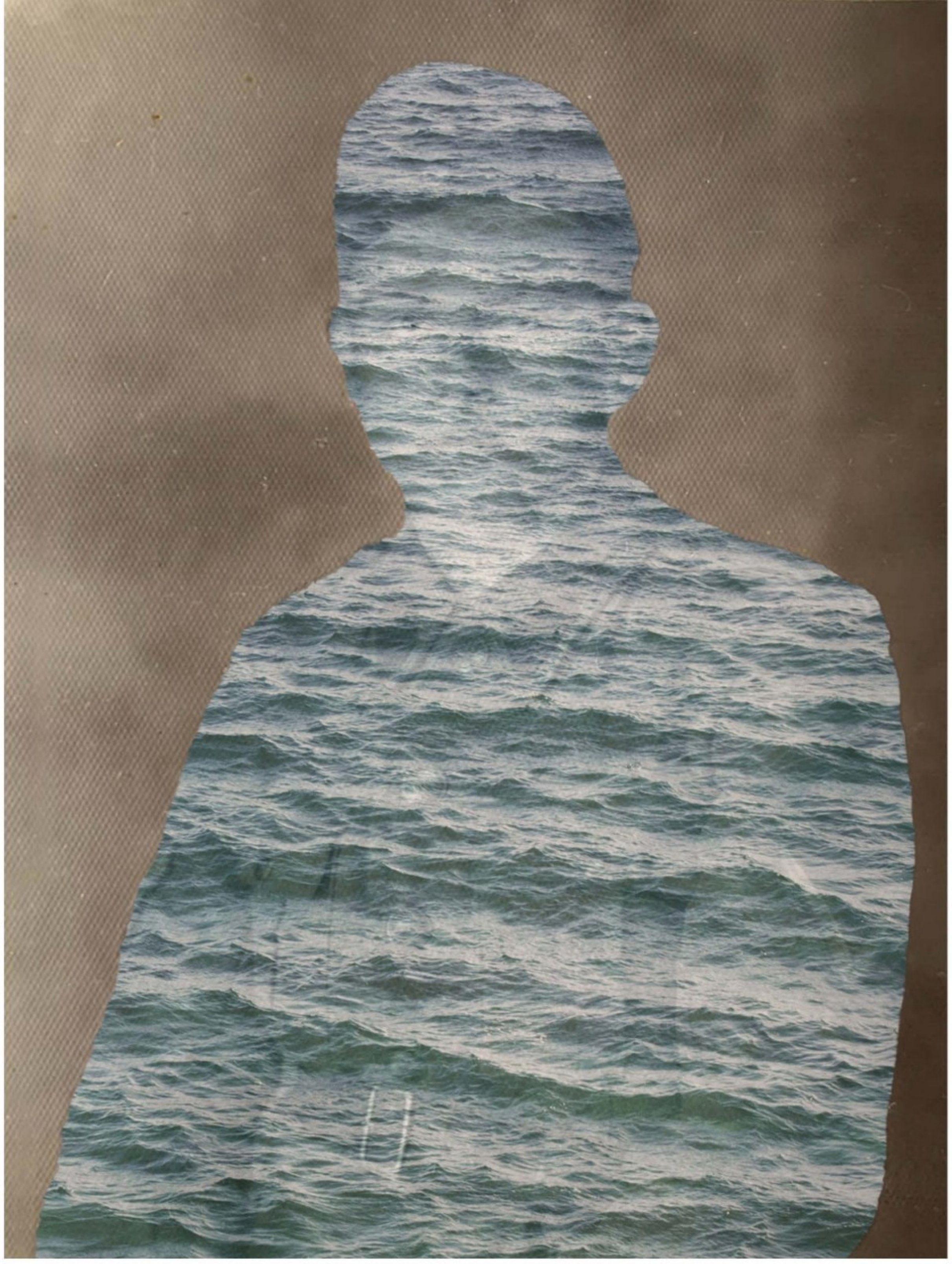
This body of work is deeply personal, inspired by my own familial history, and seeks to share a universal story of reconciliation and the transformative power of healing one’s wounds. These images call for reflection on trauma, growth, renewal, and hope for the stories not yet written.

About

Madalena Georgatou is an educator and amateur visual artist from Greece. While her foundation lies in teaching, she is deeply interested in creating narratives through her lens. Her work often explores themes of identity, memory, and the transformation of personal and collective histories. Focusing more on the imaginary than the real, she uses photography to capture emotional landscapes, creating intimate stories that reflect broader human experiences. Through her art, Madalena invites viewers to enter worlds that transcend the ordinary, offering a space for introspection, transformation, and emotional connection.

www.mageorgatou.myportfolio.com

All Images © Madalena Georgatou | Jasmine



All Images © Madalena Georgatou | Jasmine

© Nick Brandt | Rakan Sisters, Jordan, 2024

Dignified human statues in the desert

Nick Brandt

He was famous for his portraits of wild animals, like elephants, giraffes, leopards and lions in Africa, published in the trilogy *On This Earth*, *A Shadow Falls* and *Across The Ravaged Land* (2001-2012). Hereafter, he produced the series *Inherit the Dust* (2016) and *This Empty World* (2019), in which his concern about the escalating destruction of the East African natural world became apparent. For the last five years, photographer Nick Brandt has turned his lens towards the shared fate of animals and human beings in his ongoing series *The Day May Break*. Instead of making photojournalistic images of animals and humans, Brandt decided to create partly staged and partly spontaneous dramatic scenes. The most recent chapter, *The Echo of Our Voices*, shows Syrian refugees in the Jordan desert. “I wouldn’t be taking these photographs if I felt there was no hope. I wanted to show the resilience of these extraordinary Syrian families.”

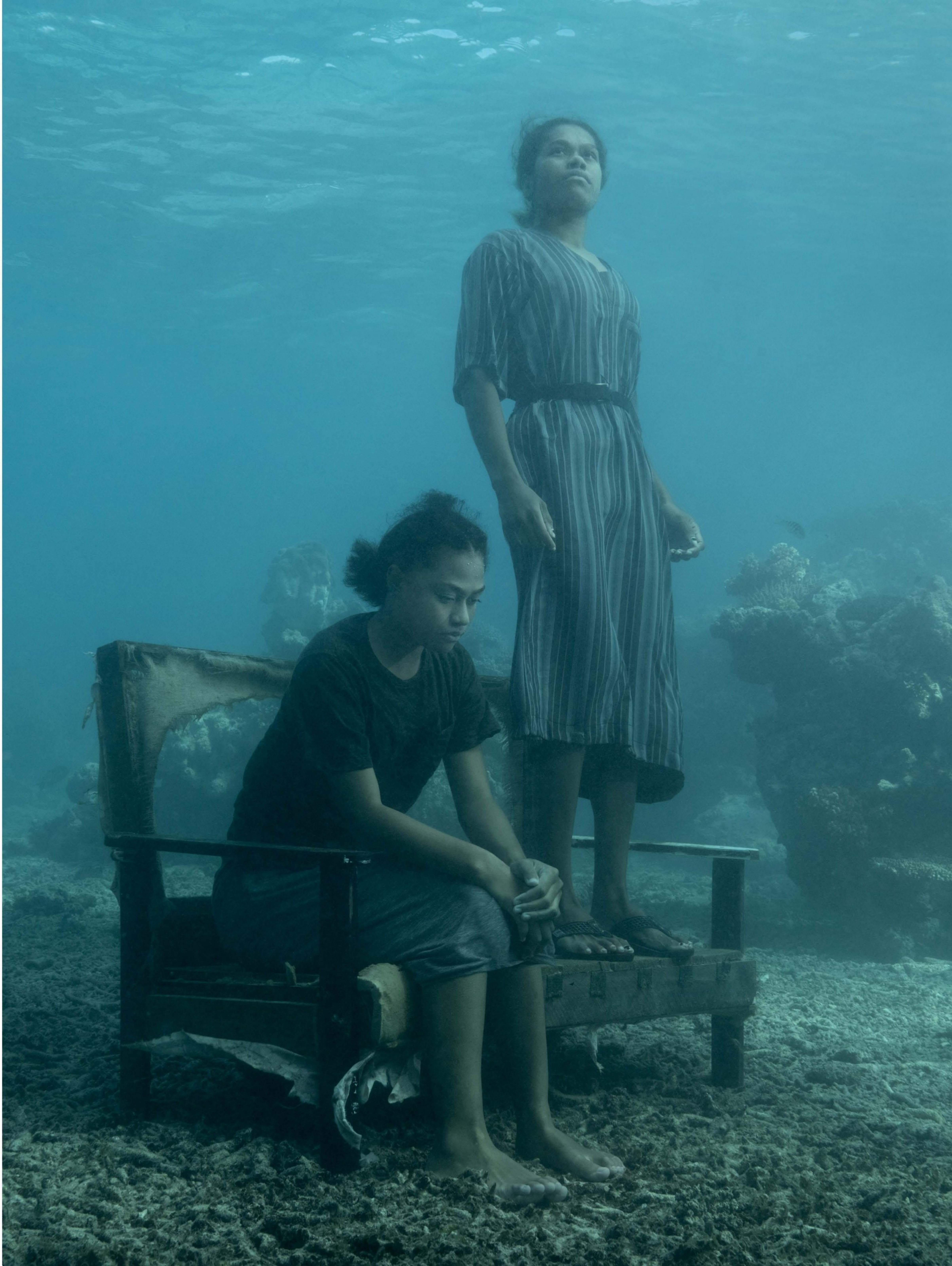
Despite the success of his early work, Nick Brandt is not charmed if he is viewed through the prism of the *On This Earth* trilogy because, according to him, it has little to do with his work of the last decade. Often this early work was referred to as wildlife photography, but Brandt corrects that label. “Wildlife photography is a genre that is associated with a certain type of telephoto action photography. What I was trying to do was take portraits of animals in the wild as sentient creatures, no different from us. And I was waiting for them to present themselves for their portrait, just as Irving Penn or Richard Avedon were waiting in their studios, while I was out in the wild.”

In the third and final episode of this series, Brandt focused more on the dangers wild animals face. In *Across the Ravaged Land*, we see photos of rangers with tusks of killed elephants and petrified birds. “I wanted to engage more directly with the destruction of the planet and the environmental injustice.” This statement still applies to all his works after his early work. His need to express his concerns about life on earth more directly resulted in a drastic change in his photography, leading to the series *Inherit the Dust* (2015) and *This Empty World (2019).* After the first two chapters of *The Day May Break,* photographed in Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Bolivia successively, Nick Brandt produced chapter three, *SINK / RISE*, which was photographed in Fiji in 2023. For this chapter, shot underwater creating bluish tones, he photographed islanders as representatives of those whose land will be lost by sea level rise, in impressively posed underwater scenes. The fourth and most recent chapter, titled *The Echo of Our Voices*, is being published this fall (2025).

Fog as a visual symbol

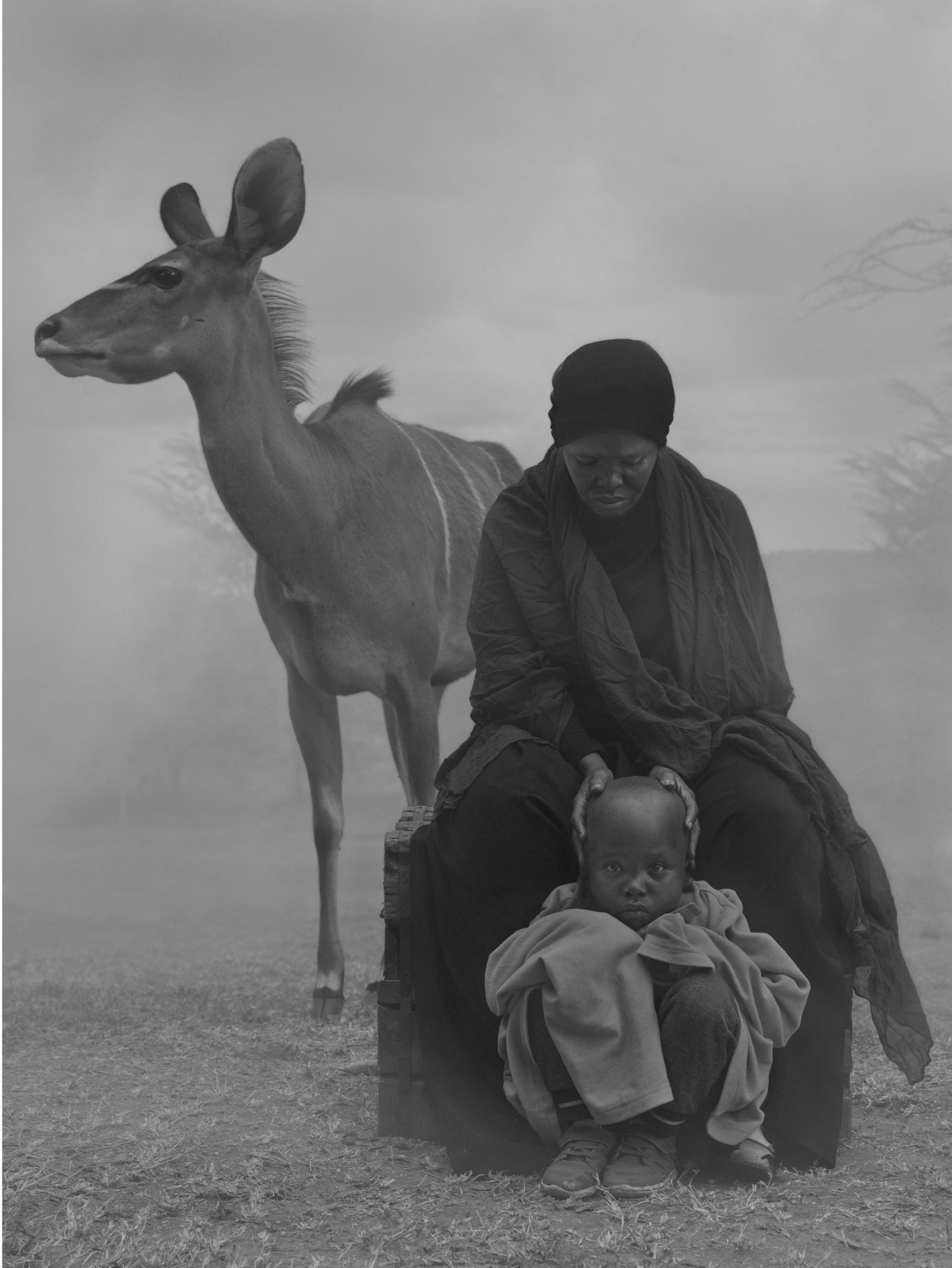
The concept of *The Day May Break* was conceived in the first year of the covid pandemic. The world seemed to undergo a dramatic shift towards disaster. Nick Brandt wanted to express his concerns about our destructive relationship with the natural world and began photographing in Zimbabwe and Kenya in 2020, followed by images taken in Bolivia in 2022. In sanctuaries and conservancies, he photographed rescued wild animals alongside local inhabitants whose lives had been dramatically impacted by climate change. The black-and-white photographs are characterised by a fog that enhances the dramatic scenes.

> “What I was trying to do was take portraits of animals in the wild as sentient creatures, no different from us.



© Nick Brandt | Akessa and Maria on Sofa, Fiji, 2023

© Nick Brandt | Patrick and Flamingos, Zimbabwe, 2020

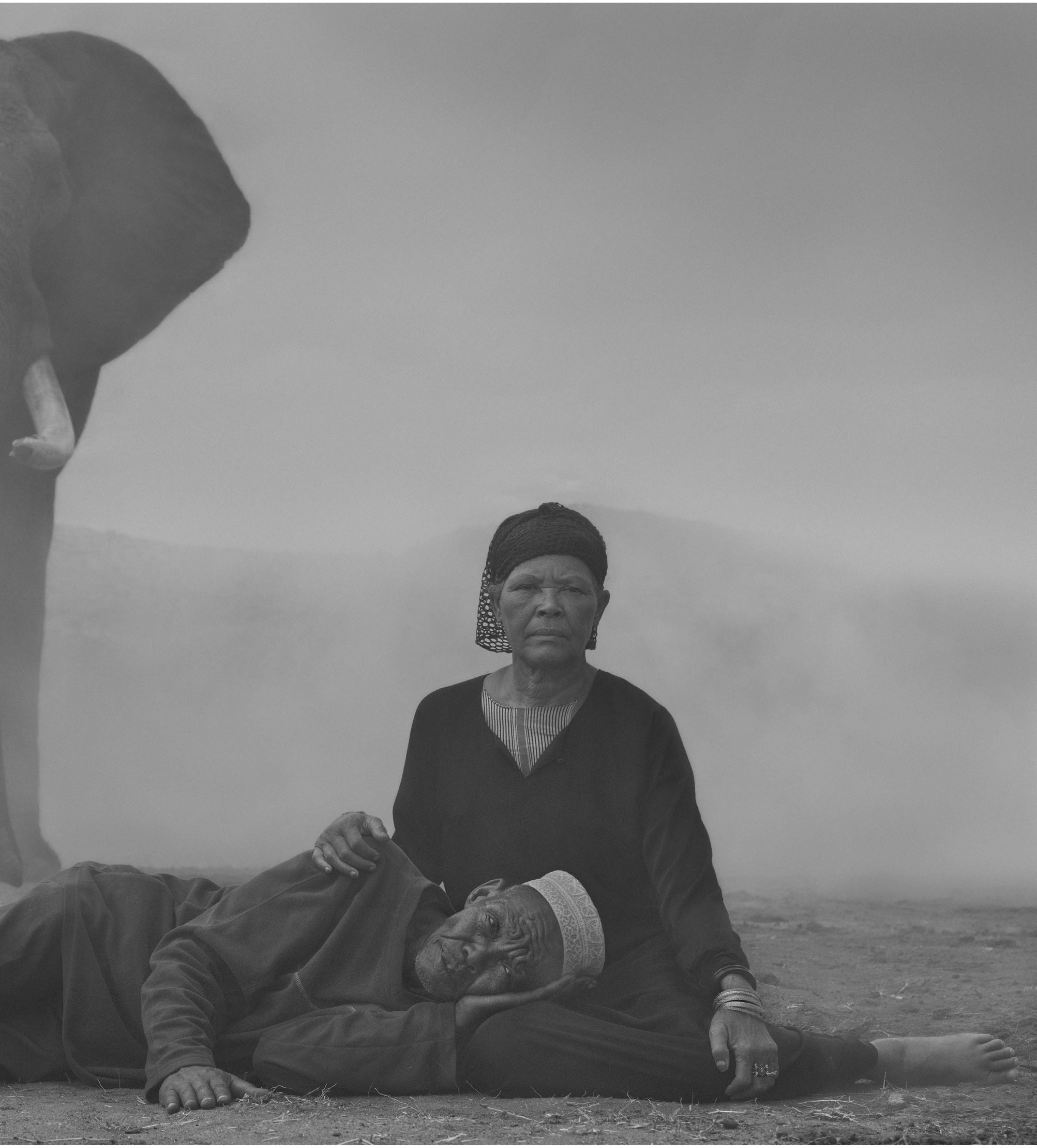


© Nick Brandt | Halima, Abdul and Frida, Kenya, 2020

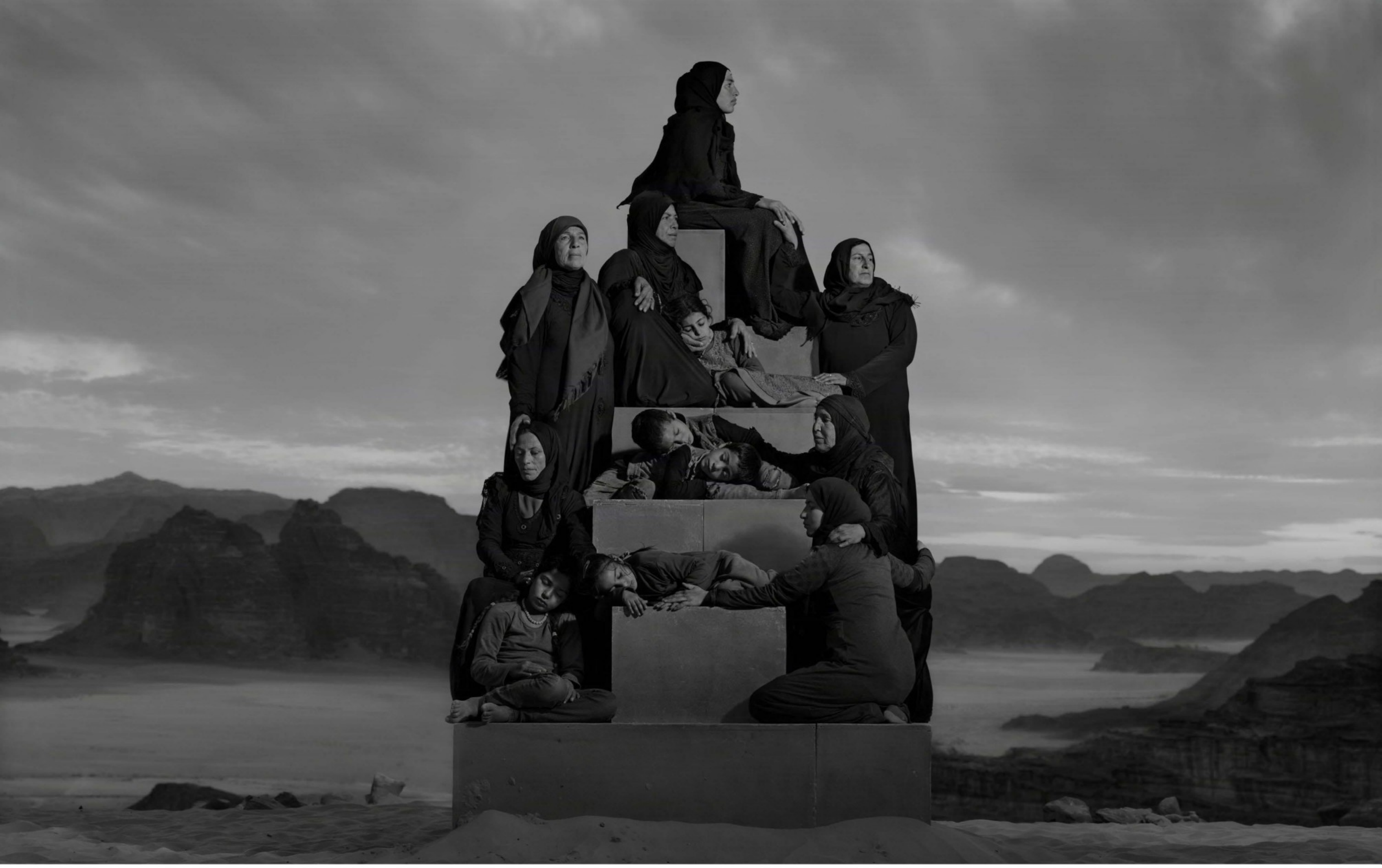
The fog was created with fog machines to give a sense of disorientation and insecurity. “It was also a visual symbol of wildfires around the world and of the natural world rapidly vanishing from sight. In those first two chapters, you have the people impacted by climate change in the foreground and an animal in the background fading into obscurity. When I photographed smaller animals like birds and monkeys, I had no choice but to have the animal in the foreground. But it still was that fog showing that everything is obscured and the natural world is disappearing from view.”

Frame of reality

In these dramatic and compelling photographs, Nick Brandt depicts in one single frame of reality the shared fate of humans and animals, staying far away from Photoshop or AI image constructions. “I find it meaningful that the animals and humans share the same frame. I have no interest in combining people and animals from different frames in post-production. I love the serendipity, the magic, the accident that can hopefully occur in camera from incidents you don’t expect. I could pre-script, previsualize, for example, to have a lion on the left of the frame and a person on the right, and combine it afterwards in Photoshop, but that is of no interest to me. In Chapter Two, you do have people in the same frame as dangerous animals like leopards and pumas. For those pictures, we placed a thick wall of glass between the two that you can’t see, which enables me to photograph the two in the same frame at the same time.”



© Nick Brandt | Fatuma, Ali & Bupa, Kenya 2020



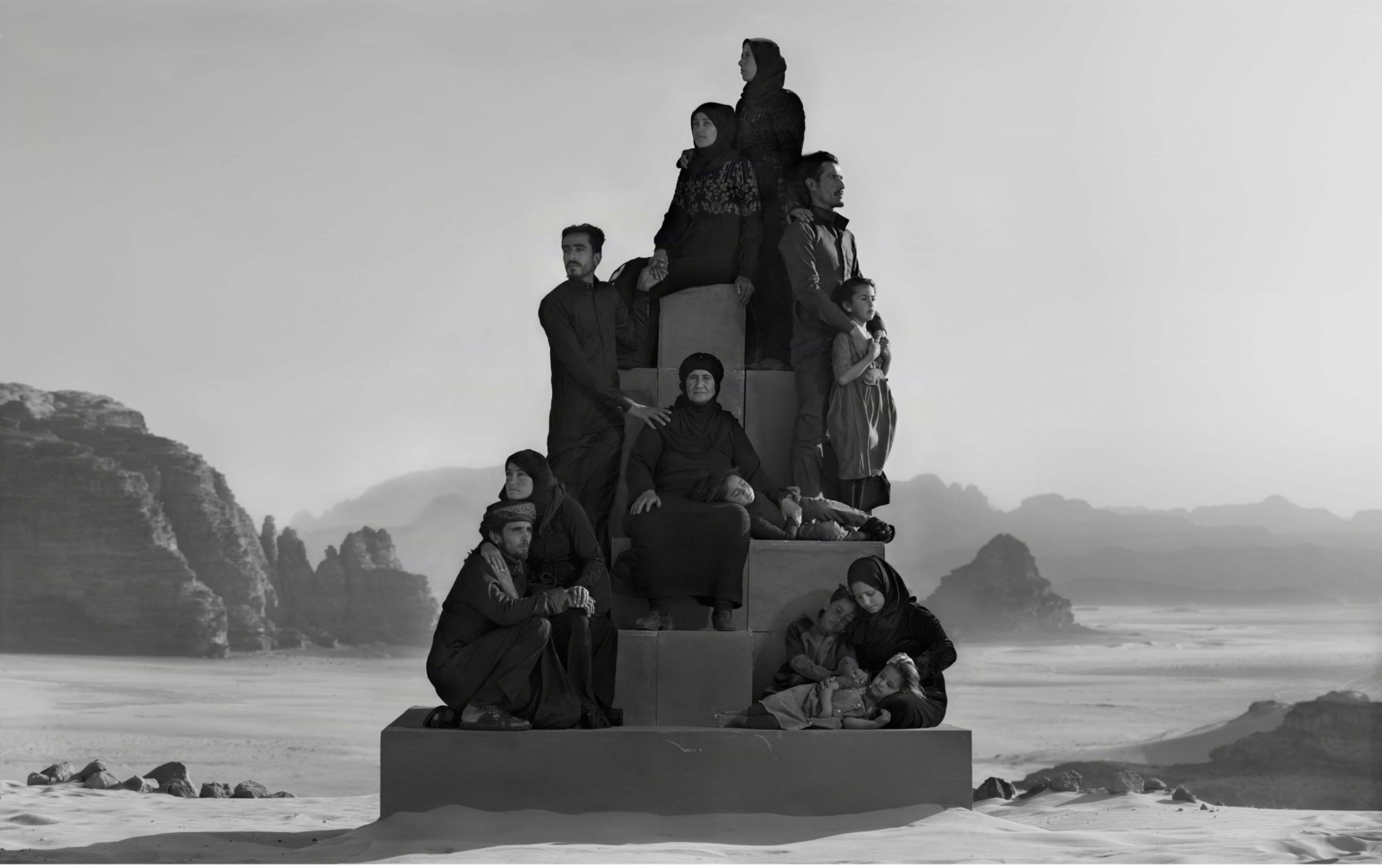
© Nick Brandt | Women with Sleeping Children, Jordan, 2024

Choreography with statues

For the fourth chapter, *The Echo of Our Voices*, Nick Brandt photographed Syrian refugees in the desert of Jordan, one of the most water-scarce countries in the world. According to Brandt, this chapter differs from the first three chapters, both visually and emotionally. It is a display of connection and strength in the face of adversity. For these compelling photographs, he choreographed the refugees, all dressed in dark attire, on stacks of boxes in the middle of the harsh and dry environment. He carefully arranged them in nearly geometric forms and aimed to showcase their strong emotional bonds. “It took a little time for them to understand what we wanted to achieve. At the end of each session, anyone interested would come over and look through the camera to see what I had photographed. By day six, they knew exactly what we were doing. They would climb up onto the boxes and find their own connections.”

Hope and resilience

With this chapter, Nick Brandt aims to move away from the melancholy of the first three chapters. “I wouldn’t be taking these photographs if I felt there was no hope. I wanted to show the resilience of these extraordinary Syrian families who have been through so much, who have been displaced by war when they fled Syria, and now are facing perpetual displacement because of climate change. They live in the second-driest



© Nick Brandt | Ftaim and Family, Jordan, 2024

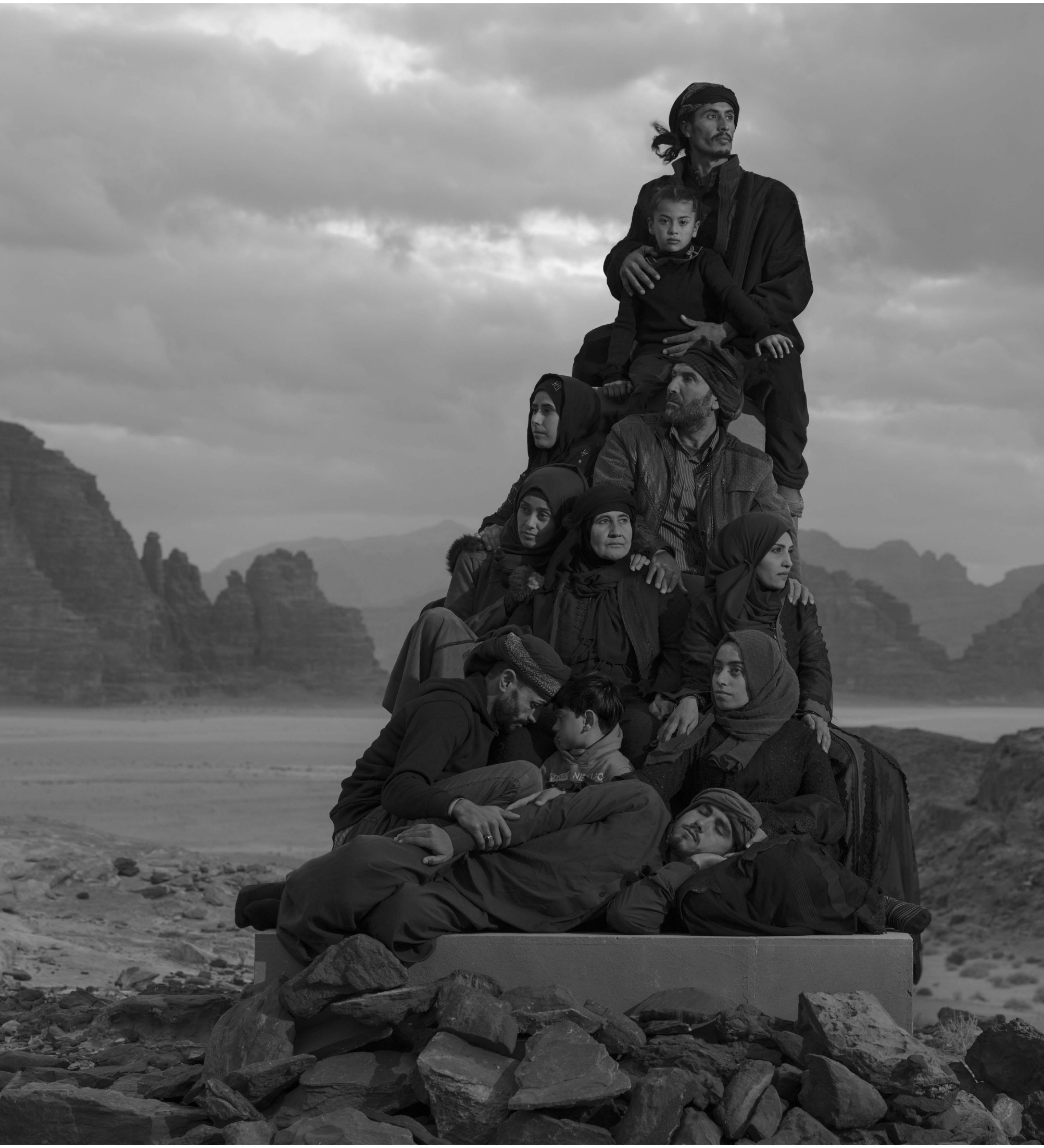
country on the planet, forcing them to relocate their tents multiple times a year to areas with sufficient rainfall for agriculture. What holds them together through all of this is family and friendship. That was what I wanted to convey with the connection within the photographs."

The Syrian people display their calm and assertive faces in the photographs. These human statues act as symbols of strength and hope. The dark clothing was chosen for aesthetic reasons. "In black and white, the dark clothing creates graphic shapes within the landscape. We asked everyone to bring their dark clothes. All the women wear this style. The men sometimes dress in Western clothes, sometimes in traditional attire."

Because of the harsh daylight of the desert, the people in the picture are highlighted by artificial light. For almost every photograph, Brandt used a 12K HMI light on a lighting stand. "We always photographed backlit or three-quarter back-lit by the sun so that the mountain ranges in the background are in silhouette. This light filled in the shadows so you can see their faces."

Staged reality and serendipity

The power of photography, even in staged work, lies in the direct connection to the real moment, to the lived reality without digital enhancement. Nick Brandt's work has gradually shifted from a purely documentary, almost journalistic approach, to a more artistic vision in which his personal interpretation is strongly evident.



© Nick Brandt | Ahmed, Zaina and Ftaim Families, Jordan, 2024

Experimenting with new ways of photographing is inherent in his practice. “Each time, I want to do something that I have not seen before. And with that comes the challenge of how to execute that creatively. There’s a healthy kind of fear involved, of how am I going to achieve this? I could have saved a great deal of money and time if I had loaded a truck with boxes and driven to where the Syrian families were living in their tents, where I could have photographed them. Then I wouldn’t have had this meaningful desert backdrop. The mountains echo the shapes of the human statues. The desert acts as a symbol of the increasing desiccation of the planet.”

Although meticulous staging plays a crucial role in these photographs, serendipity and accident also play a significant part. “I continue to embrace more and more accidents. And when you look at these photographs of *The Echo of Our Voices*, you see them choreographed with what appears to be an inch of their life. Every hand has been turned with care. Every finger has been analysed. I couldn’t have done this on my own. I worked with two creative collaborators who focused on the choreography. But within that staging, there are still accidents that happen that make the photograph work. For the photograph *Women with Sleeping Children*, we had two more children on the boxes, and during the shoot, it was getting cold. Once the sun sets in the desert in March, it’s bloody cold, and the kids were freezing. We let the two children who were cold go back to the tent, and suddenly, the negative space of the boxes opened up spaces that gave the choreography on the boxes in a much more balanced way.”

© Nick Brandt | Thomas and Vincent, Zimbabwe, 2020

Photography as expression

Even though these aesthetically excellent and ethically strong photographs, asking the audience for greater care for the earth's environment and for vulnerable people, Nick Brandt does not consider himself an activist whose main aim is to change the world. "I have always created purely for myself, not thinking about a photograph during the shooting in terms of how people will be affected or motivated or enlightened by this work. Hopefully, along the way, people will gain a deeper understanding of what these individuals and animals' lives are like. But obviously, the motivation comes from my anger at environmental injustice, and injustice just generally, and trying to find a way to express that through some, hopefully, original visual means." Jean-François Leroy, the director of *Visa pour l'image*, the International Festival of Photojournalism, wanted to exhibit *The Day May Break* because he felt that Brandt was a photojournalist, even though Brandt told him that he staged the photos. "I feel more affinity with photojournalists than I do with 'fine art photographers' because of the socio-political environmental concerns. However, I don't like the labelling of genres and types of photography. I simply create work through photography. For me, the most important question should be: Does it move you?"

© Nick Brandt I Alice, Stanley and Najin, Kenya 2020

About

Nick Brandt was born and raised in London, where he initially studied Painting and Film. He has lived in the southern Californian mountains for most of his adult life. However, as of 2025, with the dystopian hellscape that America has become under Trump and his horror show goons, he will be moving to Portugal. The themes in Nick Brandt's work always relate to the destructive impact that humankind is having on both the natural world and humans themselves. Brandt has had solo gallery and museum shows around the world, including New York, London, Berlin, Stockholm, Paris, and Los Angeles. In 2010, Brandt co-founded Big Life Foundation, a non-profit in Kenya/ Tanzania that employs more than 350 local rangers protecting 1.6 million acres of the Amboseli/Kilimanjaro ecosystem.

The Day may Break will be exhibited in Hangar, 18 Place du Châtelain,
Ixelles, Brussels, 1050 Belgium, 19 September - 21 December 2025.

www.nickbrandt.com

© Nick Brandt | Luis and Hernak I, Bolivia, 2022

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I wanted to engage more directly with the destruction of the planet and the environmental injustice.

- Nick Brandt

Crossing Identities

Highlights of Artdoc Exhibition

In a world marked by differences and complexity, *Crossing Identities* brings together photographs that showcase what connects us across borders, cultures, and experiences. The exhibition traces the threads of humanity that go beyond boundaries — visible in gestures of care, resilience, belonging, identity, and shared presence. How do we express connection across distances? Where do we find unity in today's multifaceted world? Through portraits, everyday moments, visual metaphors, and scenes of cultural exchange, the works on display invite us to consider these questions. From documentary to conceptual approaches, from subtle reflections to bold statements, the exhibition *Crossing Identities* opens a space for images that remind us of our shared ties — with one another, with culture, and with the living world around us.

Visit our online exhibition

© Emma Puig De La Bellacasa | Tree women

© Olga Malinina I Beyond the Arctic Circle

RJ-05
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© Vivi Andreadou I Threads of Presence

© Maria Helena Ramalho | Memory Unfolded on the Ground

© Lela Edgar | Resistance

© Shyam Ganju | Nothing given, everything held onto

© Ian Forsyth I Nagar Kirtan Festival

© Nina Golob I Sabiba: A Ritual of Connection

Open Call
Expressive Aesthetics

An open call for photographs where visual strength meets conceptual depth

Photography is more than representation — it is a way of shaping how we see, feel, and reflect on the world. With *Expressive Aesthetics,* Artdoc Photography Magazine invites submissions that unite aesthetic strength with conceptual depth, contributing to a dialogue where aesthetics and reflection intersect.

We are seeking work that combines visual presence with meaning: images that move beyond surface impressions, offering insight, resonance, and reflection. From abstraction to portraiture, from constructed to documentary approaches, this call welcomes diverse practices that engage with photography as both art and language.

SUBMIT YOUR WORK

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: 12 OCTOBER 2025

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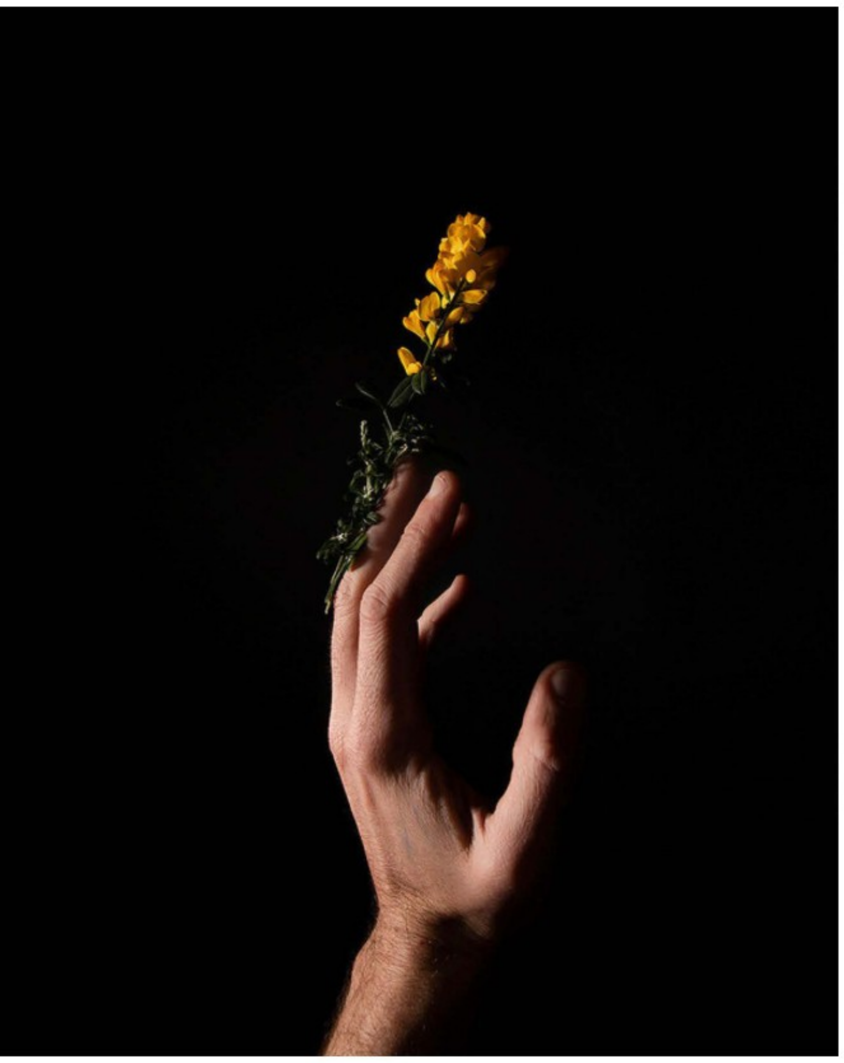

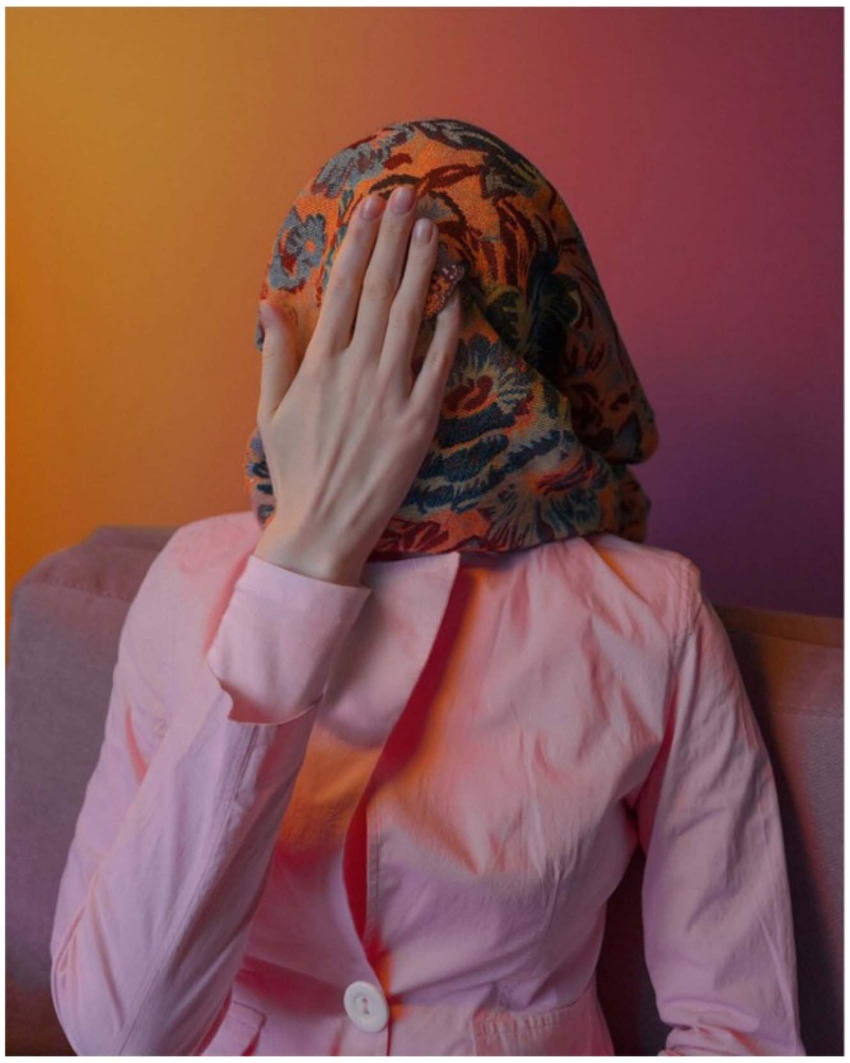

A CALL FOR
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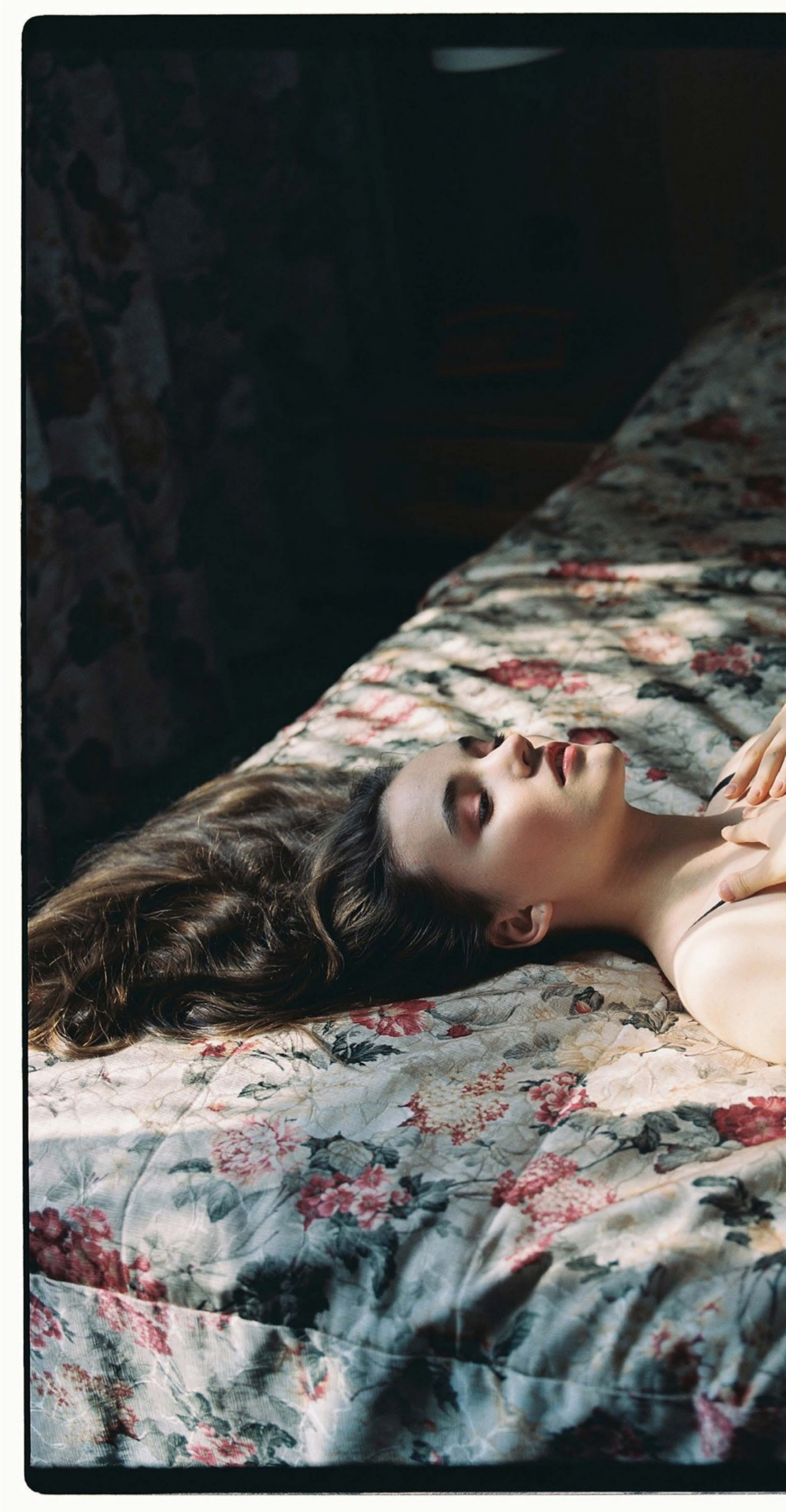
Dreamscapes of She

Xenia Chetrar

“My work explores the delicate intersection of memory, identity, and the ephemeral nature of existence. Through film photography, I create ethereal portraits of women, capturing them in spaces where reality and dreams merge. Using techniques such as double exposure and cyanotype, I embrace the unpredictability of analogue processes to evoke a sense of nostalgia and fragility. Film, with its tactile presence and intrinsic warmth, enables me to convey a timeless intimacy that the digital medium often lacks. My subjects, frequently enveloped in layers of light and shadow, become part of an ever-evolving visual narrative.



About

Xenia Chetrar is a fine art photographer specialising in classic analogue photography. With over five years of experience, she has dedicated her practice to exploring the enduring relevance of photographic film in the digital age. Her work has been featured in a range of personal and collective projects, emphasising the tactile and artistic potential of traditional photographic methods. Beyond her personal practice, she actively advocates for film photography by mentoring emerging photographers and leading an art collective that fosters creative collaboration within the medium.

www.xeniachetrar.co.uk

All images © Xenia Chetrar | Dreamscapes of She

All images © Xenia Chetrar | Dreamscapes of She

© Gala Semenova I There is a crack ... in everything, that's how the light gets in

Light Through Cracks

Gala Semenova

In *There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in*, photographer Gala Semenova transforms stories of survival into portraits of strength. Inspired by the Japanese art of Kintsugi, her work embraces brokenness as a site of beauty, resilience, and renewal. Each image, fractured and reassembled with golden seams, symbolises lives scarred by domestic violence yet bound by courage and the possibility of healing. Drawing from her own journey, Semenova rejects narratives of victimhood, choosing instead to illuminate hope and dignity. Presented as striking large-scale prints, the series stands as both a testament to survival and a call to action—urging society to confront violence while empowering those who rise beyond it.

“My project emphasises the need for hope in the face of adversity, particularly for victims of domestic violence. Rather than portraying them as mere victims, I aim to highlight their strength, courage, and humanity, inspiring others to turn tragedy into triumph. Drawing from my own healing journey, I infuse art with a message of hope and transcendence.

To visually convey this sentiment, I found inspiration in Kintsugi, the Japanese philosophy that embraces imperfections as unique and beautiful. Applying this concept to portraiture, I showcase the beauty and resilience of individuals who have experienced domestic abuse, emphasising their strength and capacity for healing.

This project does not seek to glorify domestic abuse or its effects. Instead, it raises awareness while empowering survivors by depicting them as beautiful, strong, and resilient individuals who refuse to be defined by their past. Each subject’s portrait is disassembled and reassembled with decorative gold, symbolising fractured lives being mended with positive intention. The final works are presented as large archival prints.

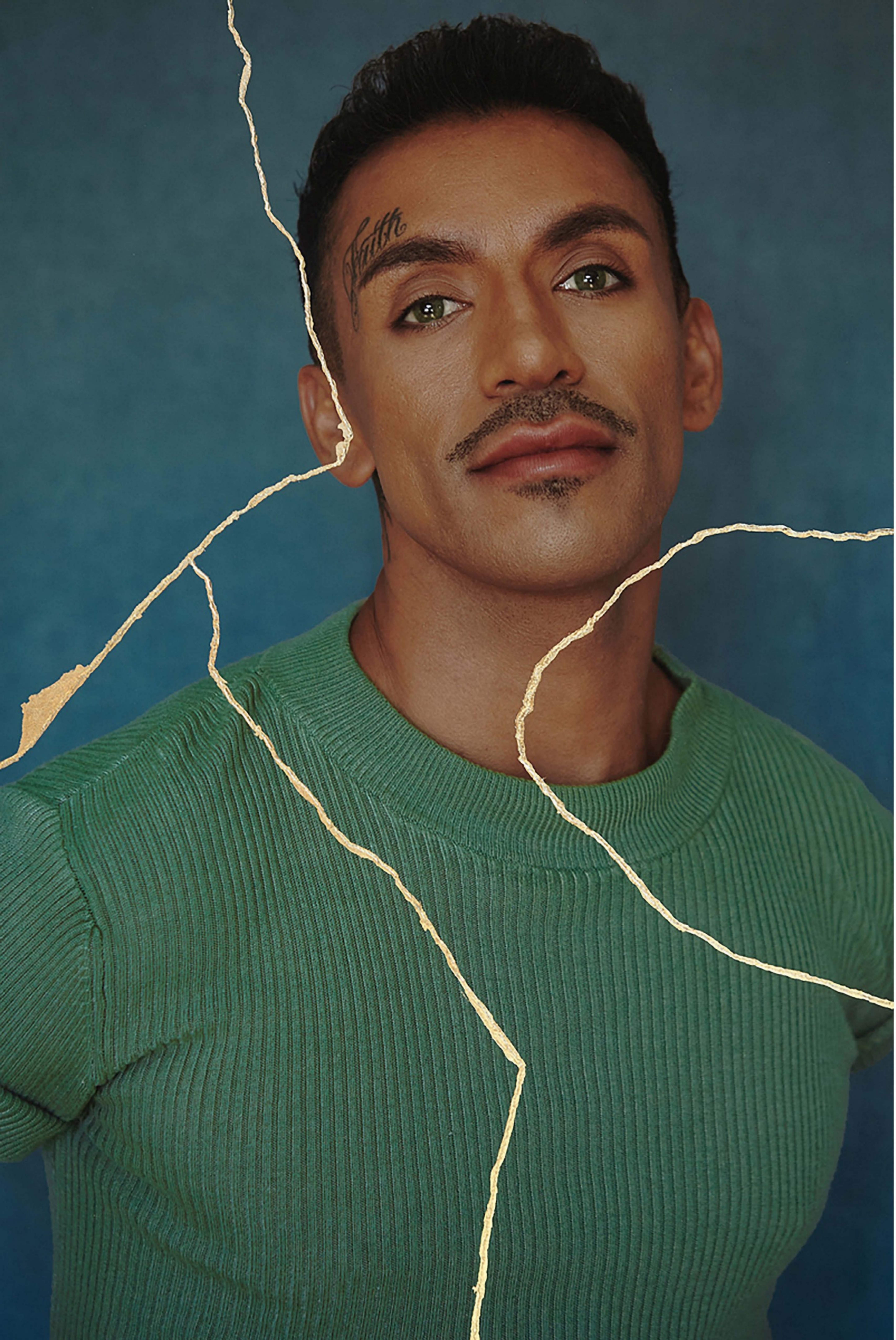
Initial progress has already been promising, motivating me to expand on the original vision. Working closely with the subjects, my goal is to guide them towards acknowledging their journeys, facilitating catharsis and closure. To further promote and distribute this work, I intend to collaborate with domestic violence and human rights organisations. With their support, I hope to reach those who will benefit from this project and mobilise others to bring about meaningful change.

About

Gala Semenova is an award-winning fine art portrait photographer based in San Diego. Her work captures the essence of the human spirit, highlighting inner beauty and resilience. Her portraits reflect vulnerability, creating space for recognition, healing, and empowerment. Inspired by colour, emotion, and shared human experiences, Gala explores themes of self-acceptance, love, and collective trauma. She believes art has the power to positively impact lives by fostering hope, compassion, and awakening. In 2022, Gala received the international Female in Focus Award, which celebrates outstanding women photographers and addresses gender inequality in the industry.

www.galinasemenova.com

© Gala Semenova I There is a crack ... in everything, that's how the light gets in



All images © Gala Semenova I There is a crack ... in everything, that's how the light gets in

© Marta Stoyanova | Amazon Descendants

Amazon Descendants

Marta Stoyanova

> “We live in a world where people increasingly call two, three, or even more countries “home” during their lifetime. The idea of belonging to a particular place becomes ever more elusive. I am drawn to small communities around the globe, each offering different perspectives on identity, connection, and cultural preservation.
> Our experiences in life shape who we are and how we perceive the world. A moment frozen in time in a photograph will tell a slightly different story to each of us. Photography is open to interpretation—and that is its beauty. My pictures exist to uplift, inspire, provide escape, and create connection.

About

Bulgarian-born and raised, Marta Stoyanova is a London-based photographer with over 20 years’ experience behind the camera. Drawing on her fascination with the natural world, travel, and anthropology, she has built a body of work exploring human interconnectedness and the role of nature as a place for healing, clarity, and strength.

www.martegallery.com

All Images © Marta Stoyanova I Amazon Descendants

The resistance of past enslaved communities

Nicola Lo Calzo

Historians generally estimate that between the mid-15th century and the late 19th century, approximately 11 to 12 million African men, women, and children were forcibly transported across the Atlantic into slavery in the Americas. Torn from their homelands, they endured brutal voyages and enslavement, shaping the economic, cultural, and demographic history of the Americas for centuries to come. Since the abolition of slavery in the 19th century, the descendants of those once enslaved still grapple with their inherited past. Now living in West Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and the Americas, they foster resistance against postcolonial prejudices and find ways to cope with their brutal history. In his extensive project, Nicola Lo Calzo, an Italian and Paris-based queer photographer and researcher, explores the complexity of the visible and hidden memories of postcolonial descendants, along with their strong and vital resilience.

© Nicola Lo Calzo | Kam

As a queer person, Lo Calzo felt a resonance with his own experience, which fuelled his interest in how Afro-descendant communities developed strategies of resistance. “How can they produce spaces of self-affirmation, spaces of self-determination against colonialism, against slavery, against oppression? This idea of refuge within or beyond a dominant system was also part of my own experience in a different way. I truly believe that there is a resonance between the ‘queer’ - in the phenomenological sense of the term, as an experience that is disoriented and not aligned with the norm - experience and that of the maroon people: both involve escaping systems of control and oppression, and creating spaces of survival, resistance, and reinvention outside the boundaries of the Norm. The connection is the act of escaping as an act of creating oneself.”

His sense of identity naturally led him to focus on these resistance practices and to gain acceptance among other minorities. “I was welcomed in various sacred spaces where this legacy of resistance to slavery is passed down through generations. In many cases, some queer people opened the doors for me and allowed me to enter these different worlds. It is not by chance that Afro-descendant practices, like Voodoo in Haiti, Candomblé in Brazil, or Tchamba vaudou in Togo, still serve as spaces of freedom for queer individuals today: these spaces are not organised according to the normative lines of society like race, gender and class, but exclusively according to the will of the Lwa divinities.”

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Relation to the past

For minority groups, especially the descendants of enslaved persons, their relationship with the past is vital because it helps them forge an identity that was stolen by the dominant system. Lo Calzo explains the importance of revisiting the past. “For them, it is important to bring back the past through their practices because it’s a way to build a contemporary identity in front of a society that is not always welcoming. For subaltern communities, the discovery of the past is a guarantee of historicity and, therefore, of humanity. It’s a strategy to face the dehumanisation of the dominant groups. The communities of descendants reenact the past, transforming and reformulating it. The contemporary practices create a new, transformative relation with the past. Their rituals actively shape their memories of the past and produce a counter-narrative.”

Nicola Lo Calzo photographs the rituals and celebrations within communities, allowing him to portray not just an outsider’s view but the lived experience of local people. “I still remain an ‘outsider’, but I try to shape my gaze in a situated way. After all, as a queer person, the possibilities of being an ‘insider’ are very limited. My perspective was shaped in a horizontal way. I have to thank my parents certainly, but paradoxically also the system. As a queer person, I was raised not only with my own gaze but also under the gaze of others. This double consciousness has given me a certain sensitivity when engaging closely with people. Moreover, I believe there are other reasons—such as my peasant roots rather than a bourgeois background—that make it easier for me to connect with rural and working-class communities, like those I have often photographed.

Through his images, he aims to capture the enigmatic complexities of practices rooted in local histories. He seeks to create an image from within, rather than from an outsider’s perspective. “I try to make a representation of these practices with a critical and situated gaze. That’s why I often work closely with the communities. It’s a way to deconstruct my gaze. For me, it is essential to understand the gaze of the people I am photographing, and to let their gaze influence me.”

Lo Calzo’s approach explains the longevity of his long-term project. “I need to spend much time with the communities, it’s the only way to develop my vision, aesthetic and ethical.”

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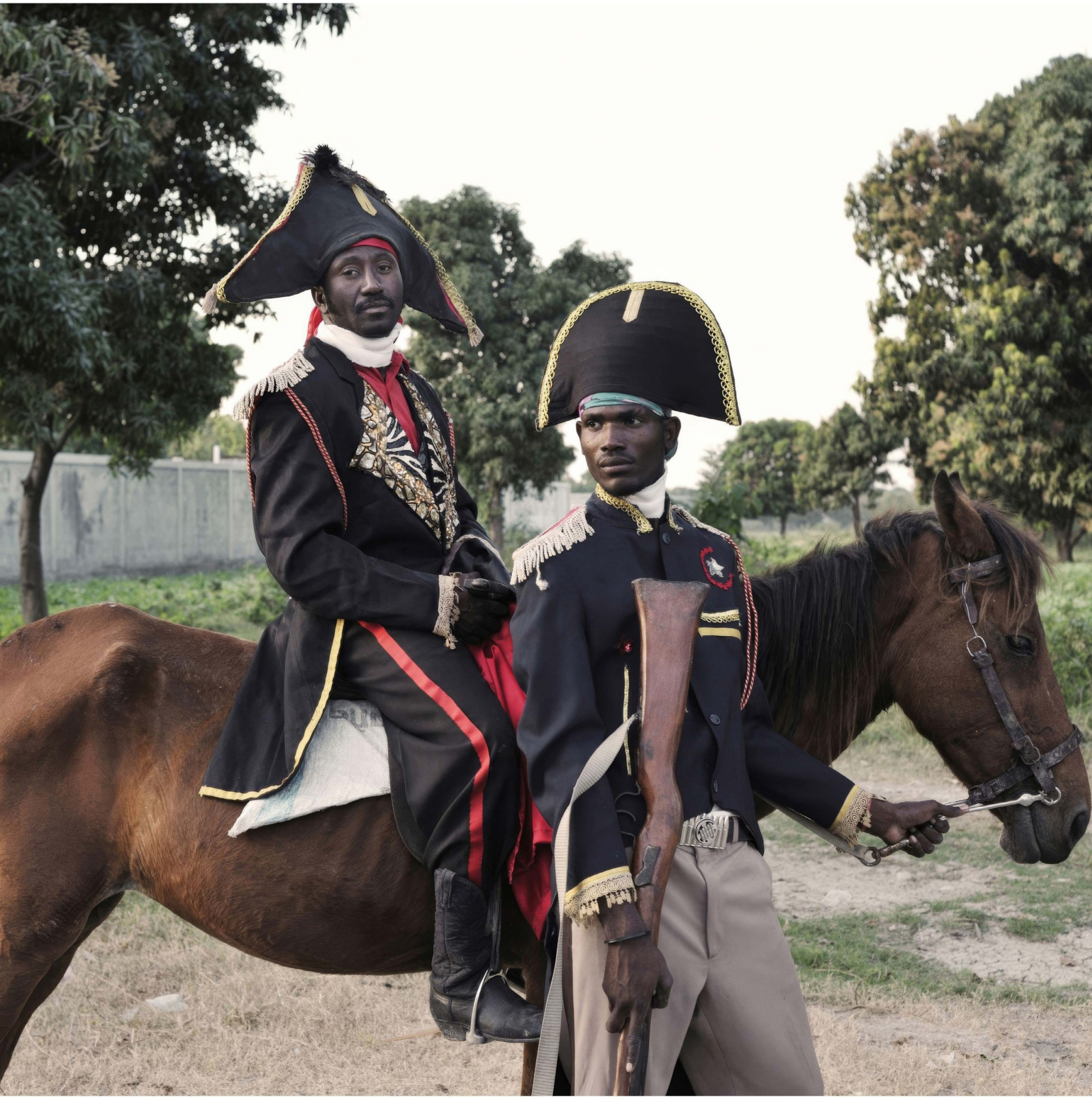

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The body archive

His work's primary aim is to depict the community's life and its connection to the past, which is also rooted in a specific relation to space, geography, and territory. Only later did the political aspect emerge. "The political, to me, is to choose to focus on topics that are usually overlooked or not very visible in the media, as well as in contemporary art or photography. When I began this work 15 years ago, it was very difficult to approach a magazine and explain why I was working on resistance to slavery. The magazines were unaware of the subject. I needed to clarify the history and geography of slavery and its resistances. Defending my work on slavery and colonialism resistance is a political act for me." The history of slavery is mainly written by colonial powers themselves, often leaving out themes like resistance and the struggle experienced by the enslaved. "Our knowledge is shaped by the official history with a focus on written archives. Most of the time, the perspective is that of the colonisers. It is not from the point of view of communities or their descendants. While I am working to rewrite this history by focusing on a different archive, what I call the 'Body Archive', most of these memories are rooted in the bodies of the people I photograph. When working with a community, you can gain their perspective on the same history. This helps to deconstruct the traditional memory of slavery and highlights resistance from the people's point of view. Consequently, I undertake extensive oral investigations because their ceremonies encompass intangible heritage.

Writing is a fundamental aspect of Lo Calzo's photographic research. "That's why I also decided to pursue a PhD, because it was important to emphasise this connection between photography and research on ethnology, as well as queer studies, black studies, sociology, and feminist studies. I have just completed a PhD in Arts, with a Practice-Led Research focus in photography.

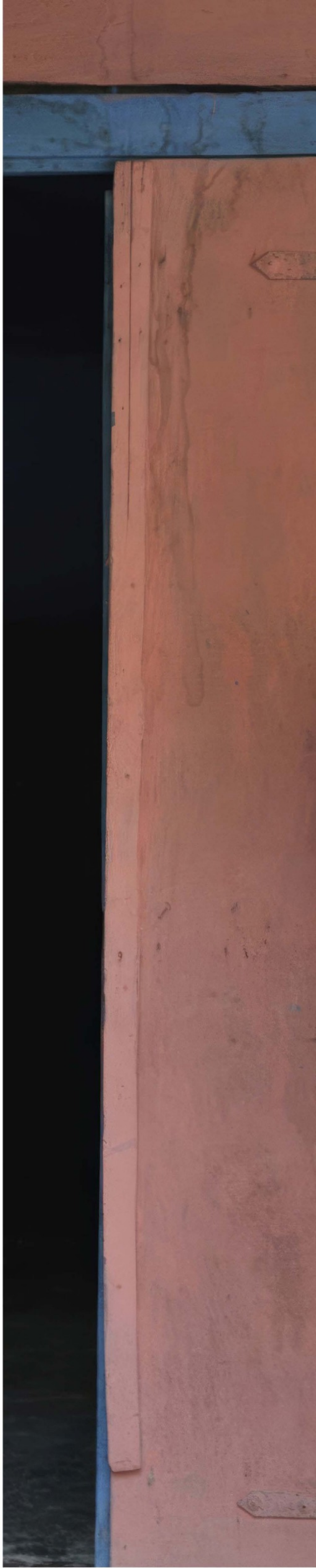
The name Kam

The project Kam was originally called Cham, but Lo Calzo changed the name in order to add a new meaning. ‘Cham’ was a name that appeared to refer to sub-Saharan peoples in the Old Testament and was used at the beginning of Modernity to justify racist opinions. “It was the way through the European countries with the Catholic Church, legitimising the slave trade, transportation, and colonisation. Cham is a distortion of the original word ‘Kam’, a term that was reappropriated in the ‘60s by the Senegalese historian and anti-colonial activist, Cheikh Anta Diop, to highlight the antiquity of African civilisations. Kam is an ancient Egyptian word referring to sub-Saharan peoples, without racial connotations. I chose to use this word as the title for my project. It was also a way for me to pay tribute to Anta Diop and his legacy.” The seemingly simple word reflects Lo Calzo’s awareness of subtle meanings, with the careful choice of this title revealing a deeper significance.

At the end of his major project, Nicola Lo Calzo plans to publish a final book that will include all the images and investigations. “I need to make a point on these 15 years of work with the book, but I think that we’ll never finish this project.”

Poetic Documentary

The photographs of Lo Calzo demonstrate a personal yet universal approach, rooted in a documentary style, full of vibrancy and colour. As a viewer, you experience the lived realities of the local people and their resilience. “The aesthetics of my work depend on the people and places I have photographed. There are works, such *a*s those I did in Suriname and French Guiana with the Bushinenge community, where I tried to incorporate the specific use of colours of this community. “I try to reproduce their use of colour, which is very saturated and flowing.



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At the same time, I aim to highlight the rich chromatic palette of the forest and the unique aesthetics that emerge from the profound relationship between Bushinengue culture and the forest environment. In other cases, for example, when I worked in Ghana, at the beginning of this project, I was closer to a more "classic" vision of photography. I used to work in a more structured manner, maintaining a certain distance from the subject and paying close attention to composition. As an architect, I've always had a natural obsession with lines and forms. Over time, however, I went through a process of emancipation. If you look at my recent work, you can notice this shift, a move away from the architectural structure that initially influenced my gaze, towards a more organic and intuitive vision."

In his photographs, viewers can discern certain enigmatic symbols, like shadows on the ground or necklaces with hidden meanings. Lo Calzo's work is both documentary and poetic. "I don't want to be too literal. I like to keep opacity in my photography because the practices I photograph also have a regime of opacity. You can only show what is permitted to be shown. This opacity respects the soul of these practices, which were raised into secrecy. It is also an aesthetic strategy. It provokes reflection and thought. The poetry in my work is fundamental. I craft my own very personal mythology around these different stories."

Identity

Lo Calzo emphasises the distinction between building identities and adopting a critical perspective. "It's crucial to valorise the critical point of view from different experiences and not to reduce a person's stance to an identity, because identities are static. They are a trap, a closed space. When we talk about queerness or blackness, it should no longer be necessary to use these categories to think of 'the Otherness'. The prevailing approach in the art world is to think in terms of identity, rather than through the notion of critical stance. The word 'slave' is an example of a false identity. Now we use 'enslaved', which means the individual was brought into slavery. This is important because this word does not diminish the person's humanity. With this word, you acknowledge that the person was originally a free man.

About

Nicola Lo Calzo is a photographer and teacher-researcher based in France since 2006. He currently works in Paris where he runs a course on anticolonial and queer practices in photography at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts de Paris-Cergy and Sciences Po Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Lo Calzo is the recipient of Strategia Fotografia Grant (2023), Bnf Grande Commande Photographique (2022), Cnap Grant (2018), nominated for the Prix Elysée (2019) and the Niépce prize (2020). In 2023, he is a founder member of the editorial committee of the digital arts research platform PLARA and collaborate, as guest curator, to the 8th edition of the International Biennial of Photographic Encounters of Guyana.

www.nicolalocalzo.com

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- Nicola Lo Calzo

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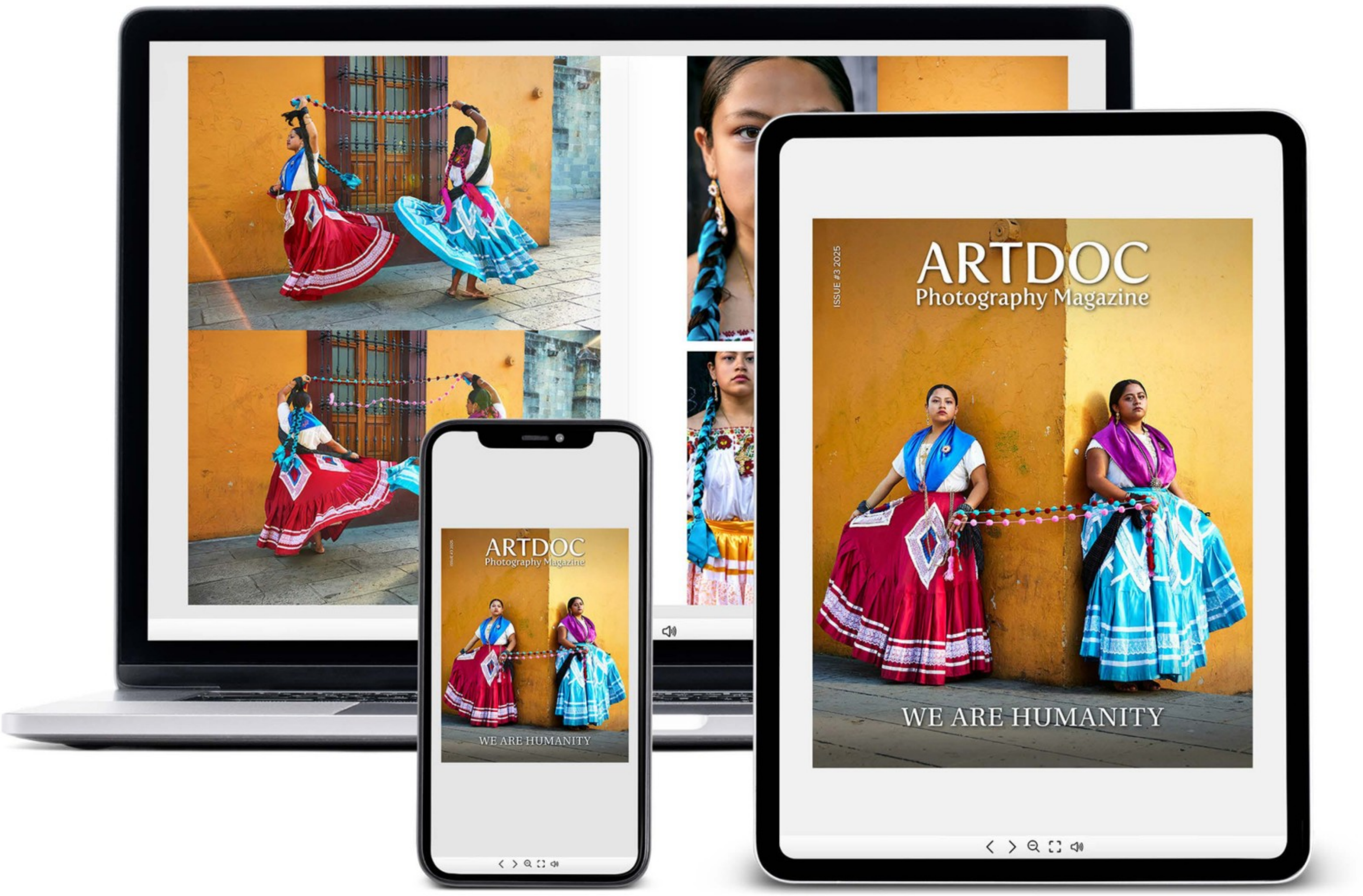
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